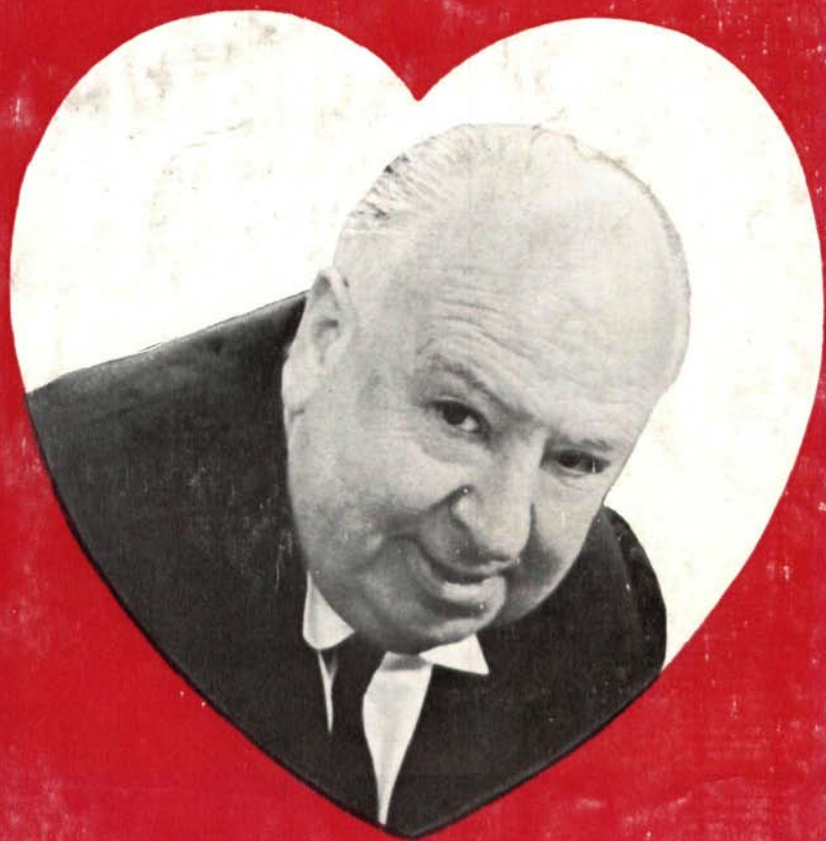


ALFRED

FEBRUARY 50¢ K

HITCHCOCK'S

MYSTERY MAGAZINE



NEW stories presented by the MASTER of SUSPENSE

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February 1967

Dear Reader:

I had been searching for something special to send to all of you this Valentine's Day, and when a friend told me about a line of chocolate-covered hearts I thought my problem was solved. He assured me the creations were masterfully-executed and beautifully boxed.

My suspicions were aroused, however, when my friend said they were available in rare, medium and well, so I was not excessively disappointed when he added that the scientist who formerly filled his needs is now in a home with a wide lawn and no access to a laboratory.

It seems he was tripped up when he sent a card to the wrong source of supply. As it is with makers of snow shovels, he had to prepare for the season well in advance. When a detective received a Valentine in August declaring, "Your heart is mine," he simply made sure it wasn't.

Now it occurs to me that this February issue is just what I had in mind all along. There might easily be more than one protagonist who also believes in getting directly to the heart of the matter.

Alfred Hitchcock

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ALFRED HITCHCOCK'S

mystery magazine

CONTENTS

NOVELETTE

VARIATIONS ON AN EPISODE <i>by Fletcher Flora</i>	137
---	-----

SHORT STORIES

THE HOOK <i>by Max Van Derveer</i>	2
THE DIAGNOSIS <i>by Henry Slesar</i>	20
DELAY EN ROUTE <i>by Dick Ellis</i>	23
TRAIN RIDE <i>by W. Sherwood Hartman</i>	37
THE TUESDAY CLUB <i>by C. B. Gilford</i>	44
ASHES OF REVENGE <i>by Hal Lewis</i>	63
A SOUND INVESTMENT <i>by James M. Ullman</i>	72
THE INVISIBLE TOMB <i>by Arthur Porges</i>	84
EYES OF THE BEHOLDER <i>by Clark Howard</i>	90
INTERVENTION <i>by Jerry Jacobson</i>	100
ONE SLEEPLESS NIGHT <i>by Jack Kelsey</i>	105
VIEWPOINT <i>by Al Nussbaum</i>	118
THRENODY FOR VIOLIN <i>by Frank Sisk</i>	125

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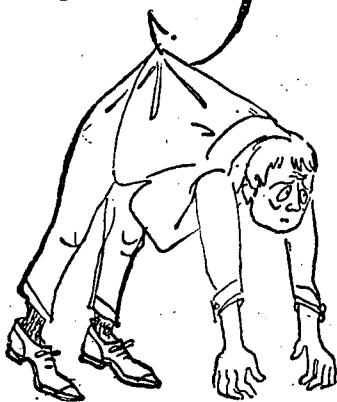
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To a hooked fish, the net becomes a remote hazard.



the Hook



IF you are tenement-born, you can live with the clanging of heatless radiators, the poignant stench of hashish and garlic, the squabble of the brats in the flat two decks down, the shrilled anger of a fishwife, the cold water from a hot water tap all of your life—or you can cut.

Rigsby was seventeen years old, a school dropout immense in body stature, with a voracious appetite for money and its by-products—and was cutting.

It was two a.m. The January cold had penetrated the walls of the leaning brownstone, seeped into the flat in a vicious challenge to the leaking radiator, and had won again. Rigsby was shivering as he dressed. There was high heat in his body, true, brought about by excitement and prospect, yet he was cold, and his bones rattled and his mind cursed as he drew on the clothing. He slid into the thick mackinaw he had stolen in October, and yanked the packed suitcase from under his bed. He

started across the shadowed front room. Heavy snoring stopped him. The snoring was a magnet. Reluctantly, he went to the open bedroom door.

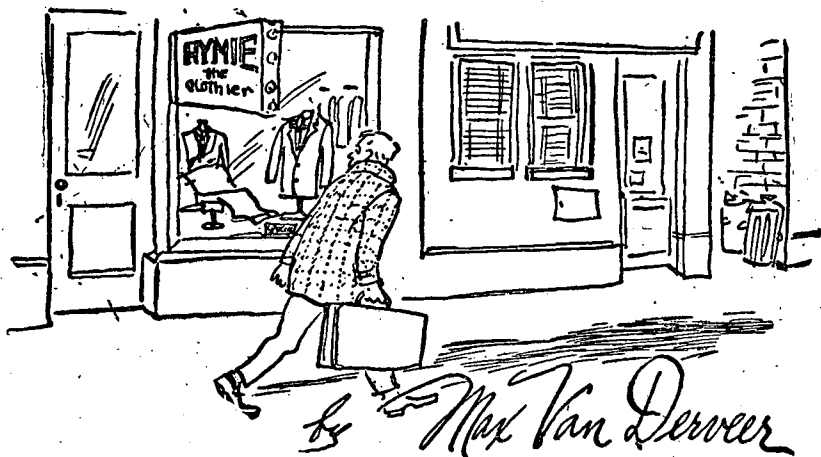
Rigsby cursed vehemently to himself as he took in the lumpy form on the sagging bed that hadn't been turned down. Why was he suddenly caught up in a strange mixture of desire to go to the bed, bend over the figure, kiss the cheek of the coarse face—and the premonition that if he did those things he might never leave the flat? That was only his ma over there; only his ma, spread-eagled and snoozing hard; only his ma, with her baby cradled in the crook of one elbow. Only his ma, who had said his father had been a World War II hero and had died that way. In truth, he couldn't have been a hero in the Big War

because of Rigsby's age. In real truth his ma didn't know his true father.

She stirred. The snoring stopped. She rolled onto her side and pushed her baby, the empty wine bottle, across the bed. In the morning when she awakened, the windows would be upside down for his ma, and there would be true panic because there were no more bottles in the flat, it was the last day of the month, and there would be an entire day to live through before the first day of February and the welfare check arrived—and because he, her son, would be gone.

Rigsby shivered, hunched deeper into the stolen mackinaw, and said, "Goodbye, ma!"

Six flights below and outside, the street was empty, the air was brittle cold, and the morning was si-



lent, so silent it seemed as if the entire city were frozen. Rigsby drew the brittle air into his lungs. It seared. He coughed and jogged down the steps of the stoop, then moved swiftly along the squalid sidewalk with the packed snow squeaking under the paper-thin soles of the shoes that had come from a relief box. There'd be new shoes tomorrow—but not from a relief box this time. This time he would *buy* a pair of shoes. He would ride out of the cold, too. He would ride the warm coach of a train, head south to Mexico, head south to sunshine and warmth. No more cold—not ever—for him.

He went around the corner and stopped short. The sign jutting from Hymie's store was dark, but it was the only one of its kind in the block. No one else could afford a sign that hung over the sidewalk; only Hymie the clothier, who was getting rich on the welfare checks he took out of the neighborhood at the end of the month, who lived alone in a room at the back of his store and boasted about living through '29 and never trusting a bank again. Once, when Hymie had forgotten to close the connecting door, Rigsby had looked inside that room. The wallpaper was yellowing but he'd had a feeling that yellowing wasn't just from age. If a man didn't

believe in banks, if a man had lived through a *Depression* and had learned that the *Almighty Dollar*, although not necessarily minted in Washington, *came* from Washington, then there could be gold in those walls . . .

Rigsby moved forward. This street looked empty, too, but his experienced eyes sought out the black doorways, the alley entrances, windows; anyone could be lurking, even on a bitterly cold night. He walked past Hymie's. The store was totally dark. He moved on to an alley entrance where he started to turn into the black depth, then jerked to a stop.

A car had come out of nowhere, and now it was coming along the street behind him. Rigsby imagined he could feel the beams of the car's headlights on his back. He put down his suitcase, turned toward a wall and cupped his face as if lighting a cigarette. A sedan passed without slowing and disappeared around the next corner. Rigsby let out a long breath. Twisting to the empty street again, he patted the flick knife in his pocket. Confidence flowed back. He entered the alley, suddenly moving on sure steps. He knew where he was now, and he knew what was ahead. He'd already done this plenty of times, practicing, so he'd know where

the hazards to sidestep awaited.

He jammed the suitcase behind a trash barrel and went up the fire escape ladder swiftly. On the roof, he took an instant to look down into the alley. Nothing. So far, so good. He crossed the roof, vaulted the parapet and was on Hymie's roof. The skylight was straight ahead. He dropped down into the store.

Five minutes later he had what he wanted: the strongbox. He found it buried in a cardboard carton in a closet. He looked over his shoulder. Hymie hadn't wiggled. Rigsby grinned coldly, attempted to open the strongbox, but it was locked. It was heavy. Plenty of loot inside, he decided, but he could manage it. He walked out of the closet, and gasped. Hymie was leaving his bed.

Rigsby dropped the box and leaped at Hymie. Rigsby's fist against Hymie's jaw shut off a growl and sent the round man reeling away. Rigsby pursued, chopped a blow into Hymie's stomach, doubling him. Then Rigsby caught up a table lamp and slammed the metal base against Hymie's ear. The blow sent Hymie stumbling out of the room and into his store. It was okay, Rigsby decided quickly. Hymie could stumble all the way

out to the street. Rigsby used the lamp again to smash out a window glass. Dropping the strongbox outside, he went after it. He was in another alley and almost home free.

Then the bells went off. Hymie had somehow managed to reach a button in his store to set off an alarm.

Rigsby panicked. He hadn't figured on bells. He grabbed up the box and shot down the alley, skidded where the two alleys crossed in the middle of the block, turned, yanked his suitcase out from behind the trash can and bolted toward the street.

Sirens wailed in the distance, loud in the still night. The sirens were coming fast, in spite of the icy streets.

Rigsby shot out of the alley with the strongbox cradled under his right arm and the suitcase in his left hand. Then hands caught him and he squealed in fright. He dropped the box and the suitcase. A blow against his solar plexus stunned him. He gasped for breath. Cold air pierced his lungs. His assailant was in front of him, small, slight. Rigsby reached for him, but the man was blindly swift. He went low and into Rigsby, who suddenly found his left arm clamped in a vise and felt a foot hook behind his left leg. Rigs-



by chopped with his free fist, but the blow did not land. The man shot out a fist and the back of Rigsby's head struck a wall. Pain blinded him. He was still. For the first time in his life, he had come against an opponent who had subdued him.

"Hear the sirens, kid?" a voice rasped. "Those are cops, and they're movin' in fast! You want me to lay you out for them, or do you want to come along and see tomorrow from behind glass?"

Rigsby couldn't talk, but he regained his balance and balked. Something hard that crashed against his spine brought a yelp from him. He whirled. The small man was there, the strongbox in his left arm, the suitcase lifted threateningly with the right hand.

"Move," the man growled. "The car."

Rigsby saw the car then, braked at the curb. Its motor purred. White plumes puffed from its exhaust.

Rigsby knew he could bolt and give up Hymie's strongbox, or he could get into the large sedan and take his chances with the man. He slid inside the car. He could wait a few blocks, get away from Hymie's, then use the flick knife and demand release.

They skidded around the first corner without seeing a police car

appear behind them. The man drove fast but carefully. Rigsby waited until several blocks had flashed past before he took the flick knife from his pocket, popped out the blade and pushed it against the man.

The man didn't even bother to flinch. "Knock it, kid," he growled, and sliced the edge of a stiff hand against Rigsby's larynx, driving him back against the door. Rigsby gagged. He forgot the knife. His fingers clawed his throat. In the moment of terror, he imagined he would never be able to talk again.

"Swallow," the man ordered. "Swallow hard, and keep swallowing."

Rigsby attempted to swallow. It felt as if his Adam's apple were blocking his throat.

"That's it," said the man. "Keep doing that. You'll be okay in a minute."

Rigsby kept trying to swallow, then he realized the man had taken his knife. He forgot his injured throat for a moment and stared hard at the man's profile. There was a clean line of nose and jaw in the dashlight, a determined set of lips, but the man's brow and eyes were shadowed by his hat brim.

Suddenly the man laughed, clipping the sound, and shot Rigs-

by an oblique glance. "You figure you're a pretty tough kid, huh?" He laughed again and dropped the flick knife, the blade in its handle now, into Rigsby's lap. "Well, you're big enough, but size can be a disadvantage too, kid—especially when you're tangling with a black belter."

Rigsby shook his head. He didn't understand.

"Advance judo. Polk Street Gym. Class one night a week. How big are you? Let's see—let me guess. 'Bout six-five, maybe six-six, two hundred and twenty-five. Close?"

Rigsby said nothing. He still wasn't sure he ever would be able to make sounds again. He fingered the knife in his lap. He itched in hesitation, but the man continued to concentrate on driving. Rigsby suddenly jammed the weapon deep into his pocket.

The man made a contented sound. "Smart, kid." Then he asked, "You got a name?"

"Rigsby." It came out reflexively and Rigsby was surprised to hear the sound.

The man grunted. "How old are you?"

Rigsby told him.

"Are you tough or do you just look it?"

"Nobody's ever put me down."

"I just did, boy."

Rigsby remained silent. He felt defeated, and he didn't like the feeling. It was foreign to his nature.

The man also remained silent as they rolled into a neighborhood of high buildings and white fronts. The man seemed on familiar ground. He turned three corners, and then they were going down a ramp into the basement garage of a luxurious apartment building. A man in white coveralls opened and closed the garage door and disappeared. The man braked in a stall and got out of the sedan without saying anything, taking the strongbox from the back seat. Rigsby grabbed the suitcase and trotted after him. They entered a self-service elevator. Rigsby towered over the man as they rode the elevator up high. They stepped out on thick carpeting and then entered an apartment that had Rigsby gaping at its richness.

The man was abruptly at ease. He put the strongbox on a couch and grinned at Rigsby. Small, white teeth flashed against a background of dark, handsome face. His skin looked like tanned leather. Good leather.

Rigsby was taut. The man shrugged out of his overcoat, swiped off his hat, put both on the back of the couch.

"Relax, boy," the man said. "Put

down the suitcase. My name is Salvadore Jack. You ever heard of me?"

Rigsby had difficulty believing. Salvadore Jack—who in the city hadn't heard about him? Maybe hood, maybe not hood, but big. Very big. He got his name in the papers plenty. Sometimes for helping out with one of the charities, sometimes because the cops found a dead man, and they thought Salvadore Jack might know how the man became dead.

Rigsby put down the suitcase, then blurted, "How come you brought me here? Why—"

"When I saw you duck into the alley, boy, I figured something was up so I drove around the block and waited. Who did you hit?"

"Nobody!"

Salvadore Jack's lips twisted when he grinned and the twist made Rigsby feel queasy. He shuffled large feet and suddenly couldn't meet the man's stare.

"Boy?"

Rigsby told him.

Salvadore Jack nodded and seemed to digest the words. Then his eyes became hard and bright, and he asked, "Did you use the knife on this Hymie?"

"No."

"Anything?"

"A lamp. I hit him when he

woke up, that's all. Not hard."

"Did you kill him?"

"No."

Salvadore Jack sighed. "Well, let's see if it was worth the effort, huh?"

He went into another room and returned with a long, strange-looking tool. Salvadore Jack worked the point into the lock of the strongbox and twisted slowly. When the lock snapped, Salvadore Jack squatted, put a hand on the lid of the box and grinned up at Rigsby.

"Do we split, kid? Down the middle?"

Rigsby shuffled.

"I could have left you for the police," said Salvadore Jack. "All I'd had to do was lay you out on the sidewalk. I could have, easily, and you could have ended up in a Job Corps camp instead of here. Worse, you could be looking three to five, maybe seven years, in the face this very instant. You could be in a precinct station and—"

"I understand," interrupted Rigsby.

"Sure?"

Rigsby felt the pressure of the man's words, felt the screws twisting into his body, and he saw Salvadore Jack in a new light. He saw a man getting kicks out of applying pressure.

"Open the box!" Rigsby

snapped angrily, his face red.

Salvadore Jack's leather face broke. His white teeth flashed. "Then we split?"

"Yeah, yeah, we split."

Salvadore Jack opened the lid—and they were splitting papers that had browned with age: a birth certificate, a marriage license, divorce papers, others.

There was no money. All of the weight of the box was the box itself.

Salvadore Jack stared up at Rigsby for a long time before he rocked back on his heels and laughed loud and long, while Rigsby cursed Hymie the clothier, and then wondered what this happy cat squatted before him was going to do with him now.

Salvadore Jack finally quit laughing, took a fresh handkerchief from the breast pocket of his coat and dabbed at his eyes. "Zero, kid," he said, "a big fat zero." He chuckled.

Rigsby picked up his suitcase.

"Where are you going?"

The sharp words stopped Rigsby. There was no laughter in the man now, no chuckles.

"Put down the suitcase, kid. You're not going any place. You don't have any place to go."

"I'm cuttin' out of town."

"On what? You didn't get your stake."

"I'm . . . cuttin' out anyway."

"Have you got a mother and father, boy?"

"I've got a ma. Drunk."

"So you stick, kid. You stay here the night, and in the morning we'll talk. When the mind is sharp. My mind."

"I wanna fly."

"You stay!"

Rigsby remained. Salvadore Jack put him in a bedroom, allowed him to disrobe and get into the bed, then stood framed in the doorway. He was smoking a cigarette and he took several slow puffs before he said, "Rigsby, there's only one way to operate. You're young. You haven't figured it yet. So I'm telling you. It's with a sharp mind. A guy has to think. Remember that."

Rigsby remained silent.

"People get into corners, kid. You don't have to back them. Most people will get into a corner by themselves. All you have to do is have a sharp mind, recognize the fact that someone *is* in a corner, then keep the walls pressing in on him. People in corners pay off."

"How am I gonna pay you off, Salvadore?"

Salvadore Jack was tense and still for a moment, then he chuckled and pulled on the cigarette. He reached for the door knob. "That,

kid," he said, "is what I have to figure tonight. That's why I want you here when I get up in the morning."

Rigsby tossed and turned the remainder of that night. Sometimes he dozed but he would not allow deep sleep to envelop him. His mind was filled with images of Hymie the clothier stumbling away from him to press an alarm button, and with Salvadore Jack's words about people and corners. When he wasn't dozing, he listened hard. He attempted to hear movement in the apartment. Once, he thought he heard a muffled voice and he leaped from the bed to put his ear against the door. He heard nothing, but he remained on edge. Since Hymie's box hadn't produced, Salvadore might get some wild idea about calling the police. The police could have a beef with Salvadore, and the little man could try to square himself by turning in a kid who had made a hit on a clothier.

Morning light finally came and Rigsby jerked up in bed and listened hard. He had been dozing again. Was Salvadore Jack on the telephone? Was it his voice he had heard? Rigsby finally decided it was a radio announcer. He slumped and wiped perspiration from his brow. Then Salvadore Jack opened the door and came

into the bedroom, carrying a tray with coffee and cups on it. He was dressed in casual clothing. He put the tray on the table beside the bed without saying anything, poured coffee, then took his cup to a chair and sat. His face was a mask, but Rigsby suddenly had the queasy sensation that something was wrong. It was in Salvadore Jack's dark eyes, the way he was staring.

He said, "You've got big trouble, kid. This Hymie is dead. It's on the radio this morning. You killed him when you hit him with that—"

"But I didn't hit him that hard!"

"The police say you did."

Rigsby started to leave the bed. Salvadore Jack leaned forward and slammed a palm against his bare chest. "Hold it. Get off the panic button. The police don't know *who* hit Hymie."

"But you just said—"

"That was a figure of speech, kid. I didn't mean they know it was you. I meant they are saying that *whoever* used the lamp on Hymie—"

"Well, I gotta blow anyway! I gotta get out of town!"

"And just where are you going to blow to?"

"Mexico! Anyplace!"

Salvadore Jack sighed, shook his head, sipped coffee. "Kid, where do

you live? I mean where is the flat you and your mother shared? In the same neighborhood? Maybe around the corner from this Hymie's place?"

"Yeah, man, 'round the corner!"

"And you want to blow, huh? You want to disappear? How do you think that will look to the cops? I mean, sooner or later, they're going to find out a kid who lived around the corner from this Hymie cut out the same night Hymie got his everlasting. Now, what are the cops going to figure then? Are they going to look for the kid in the city or are they going to look someplace else—like California, or Texas, or Mexico. Kid, you're going to hang tight!"

Rigsby sat rooted, staring, perspiring.

"Look," Salvadore Jack said, "ever since I heard the first newscast, I've been thinking. Your best bet is to stick. Right here in the city—but maybe with a new face, huh?"

Rigsby gaped, and Salvadore Jack went on, "I know a guy who can reshape a face, kid. He turns up the corners of the eyes, turns down the corners of the mouth, bends the nose a little, hollows—"

"But why me?" Rigsby blurted. "Why would you—"

"Because I can use you, boy."

"Doin' what?" Rigsby demanded.

"You're big, you're strong."

"Doin' *what*?"

"I might kill this guy, and I don't want him dead. My judo training sometimes becomes too instinctive."

"What guy?"

"I want him roughed up. You don't have to know why."

"What guy?"

"He's sixty-seven years old. He shouldn't give you trouble."

"You want me to beat up an old man for you?"

"Exactly—and there will be others."

"You want me to be a strong-arm?"

"The pay is good, Rigsby."

"No. I don't beat up old men for anybody!"

Salvadore Jack's eyes snapped. He got up and left the bedroom. Rigsby went after him fast. Salvadore Jack had a hand on a telephone when Rigsby yelled, "Don't do that!"

Salvadore Jack turned from the phone, stared at Rigsby.

"What are yuh doin'?" Rigsby bleated.

"Calling the police," Salvadore Jack said thinly. He lifted the receiver. "I tell them I've got the kid they want. I tell them I've got the kid who knocked over Hymie. I give them a story. They might

not believe the story, the cost may be a little heavy at the next police benefit, but—"

"Okay!" Rigsby rasped. He shuddered. "Okay, I listen!"

"You don't kill the old man," Salvadore Jack said, putting the phone together. "You leave the flick knife here, but you do good work. You put him in a hospital. I want him to remember."

Rigsby made the victim a hospital patient. He fractured both of the man's arms and the man never would breathe properly through his nose again. Then Rigsby became ill when it was finished. He had to stop in an alley and get well. He was troubled, too. He didn't have his new face, the one Salvadore Jack had promised, and it bothered him when he was on the streets. He felt that all cops were taking a second look at him.

"Salvadore," he complained, "when am I gonna get my new face?"

Salvadore smiled. "Patience, boy. The guy I know is out of town."

"Maybe I should vamoose, too. I mean, ain't I done enough for yuh? Can't you let me off the hook now? Can't I go to Mexico?"

"The Big One is right around the corner, kid."

"Big One?"

Salvadore Jack laughed. "The first one was just a dry run."

Rigsby didn't like the sound of the laugh. They were in one of Salvadore Jack's legitimate places of business: bowling, dining, dancing, drinking. It was a large spread, plush, fancy, plenty of neon, plenty of frills, thick carpeting, deep chairs, padded upholstery in the lounge—where they sat—good-looking waitresses in skimpy black outfits and black mesh hose.

"I'm waiting for a guy," Salvadore Jack said, drinking beer from a bottle.

"That dry run—" Rigsby pressed.

Salvadore Jack leaned across the tiny table that separated them and chucked Rigsby's shoulder with a fist. "I had to know about your nerve, kid. I had to know how far you'd go. You're a little rough around the edges but you didn't kill him and that's good. I may want this payoff in a hospital, too, *but I won't want him dead*. Then after this job, kid, you get a choice. New face and stick with me, or old face and cut. Okay?"

Rigsby wasn't sure. "I thought it was gonna be new face and cut."

"Did I say that?"

Rigsby didn't answer. Why argue? It would be old face and cut. Then he asked hopefully, "Do I get him tonight?"

"Maybe tomorrow night, kid. I haven't bought him yet."

"Bought?"

"His name is Alex Blohme. Right now he belongs to Silver, but I can buy him. The only trouble is, he'll cost five G's."

"Five?" Rigsby gulped.

"Blohme is a horse nut. Silver has been floating him, but all of a sudden Silver is tired of floating. Silver wants his money."

Rigsby knew Silver only by reputation, but that reputation was big. Silver was probably the biggest loan shark in the city, and so were his interest rates.

"Silver's coming here tonight," Salvatore Jack said with a tight smile. "We're going to deal."

Rigsby shook his head. "I don't understand, Salvatore. Why do you want to buy a man just so I can work him over?"

"You missed the point again, kid. I said I *may* want him in a hospital. If he wants to play ball, he doesn't get a scratch."

"What kind of ball?"

Salvatore sighed. "It's his father, actually. His father is Blohme Radio. You ever heard of it?"

Rigsby shook his head.

"It's a little plant, but big in operation. Government stuff for the space program. Alex works for father. That's what I have to fig-

ure. How much is it worth to father to keep sonny working?"

"Hey! I don't want no part of a kidnappin'! That's a big rap."

"Kid," Salvatore Jack broke in impatiently, "let me do the talking, huh? Let me lay it out for you?" He lit a cigarette. "Sonny is a brain at Blohme Radio. I understand it's his brain that keeps the place operating. Now, do you figure father is going to want sonny in a hospital, laid up for weeks, maybe?"

Rigsby struggled with it.

"Look," Salvatore Jack said, "sonny is into Silver for seven-five but Silver can't collect. I come along. I tell Silver I'll give him five for the guy. Silver doesn't like it; there's no profit. He's losing his interest, what working money is supposed to bring in. On the other hand, if I pay five, Silver has his working money back. He hasn't lost a dime; and sonny has become my sweat. Only with me, he isn't a sweat because I've got you."

Rigsby shook his head. "If he doesn't pay Silver, how come you figure he'll pay you? Maybe he'll just take his beating and—"

"That's where father comes in, boy," Salvatore Jack said with a smile twisting his face. "He will pay to keep sonny out of a hospital."

"You really sure of that?"

Salvadore Jack smoked in silence for a few seconds. "Not positive, of course, but sometimes a guy has to take a chance."

He took it. He bought Alex Blohme from Silver.

Two nights after the sale they were sitting in the dark sedan on a shadowed sidestreet. "Kid," Salvadore Jack said from the back seat, "sometimes a guy finds gold where he least expects it."

Rigsby was confused, but he didn't turn around. He gripped the steering wheel hard and continued to stare down the empty street, waiting. Behind him, Salvadore Jack laughed softly again. "I found out something about sonny," he said. "This guy is a piperoo. Remember what I keep telling you about brains and using them? Well, sonny has brains. He's smart, maybe even a genius. Anyway, he's laid out these plans for a static-free radio for spacecraft. It's still on the drawing board, boy, but it's completed—and it's gold."

Rigsby shook his head. They were waiting for Alex Blohme. Alex had been informed by Silver of his sale. Then Alex had received a telephone call from Salvadore Jack. Now they were waiting for Alex, and Rigsby was puzzled. In the first place, he

had thought Salvadore Jack was going to demand the money from Alex Blohme's father; in the second, Salvadore was now cackling over radios and drawing boards and gold. It was all very confusing. Salvadore just wasn't making sense.

"Do I beat him up tonight?" Rigsby wanted to know.

"Patience, boy. Patience."

But there was no patience inside Rigsby. "What if he doesn't show? He's already five minutes late."

"Here he comes."

Alex Blohme was a hunched, thin man who came along the street as if he were walking to his own funeral. He almost jumped out of his shoes when Rigsby opened the front door of the sedan. No dome light flicked on inside the car. Salvadore Jack had seen to it. Alex Blohme hesitated, then folded onto the seat beside Rigsby as if resigned to having reached his grave.

"Hit him, kid," Salvadore Jack said from the back seat.

Rigsby brought a fist around instinctively and slashed it against Alex Blohme's mouth. The hunched man pitched forward with an animal sound and covered his face with his hands.

"No blood on the floor," Salvadore Jack said.

Rigsby caught Blohme's coat

collar and jerked him erect so the blood from his teeth would drip on his coat.

"Now," said Salvatore Jack from the back seat, "you understand me, Mr. Blohme. I'm not like Silver. I play rough. I want my ten thousand."

"B-but I only owe seven."

"You now owe ten. I bought you, Mr. Blohme. There must be a profit for me. Agreed?"

"W—who are you?"

That told Rigsby something. He now knew why the bulb had been removed from the dome light. The hunched man might recognize him in the future, but he never would know Salvatore Jack.

Then Salvatore Jack suddenly became crafty. "I understand, Mr. Blohme, you have been contemplating a sale."

The hunched man shivered.

"I understand you have been in contact with a certain party at a competitive radio firm. How much are you dealing for?"

Blohme seemed unable to speak. Rigsby pinched the man's neck cords hard and Blohme cried out. Rigsby eased the pressure. Blohme stuttered, "It—it isn't anything—like ten thousand."

"How much?"

"Seventy-five hundred. That's what—I owe."

"You owe ten grand, Mr.

Blohme. You will have to negotiate again. You will have to tell your competitor the price of the plans has gone up."

"H-he . . . I don't think he will pay."

"Blohme, I'm not stupid!" said Salvatore Jack. "Ten thousand for those plans is pittance when you consider their future sale to the government!"

"All right," mumbled Blohme.

"Good." Salvatore Jack sounded satisfied. "Now, when are you to deliver the plans?"

"T-tomorrow night."

"How? Where?"

"I'm to meet a man—in a downtown bar. At ten o'clock we are to be in the rest room."

"You get the money then?"

"Y-yes."

"We'll take you. We'll meet you here. You be here at nine o'clock sharp. We'll be parked just as we were tonight. You may go now, Mr. Blohme."

"I don't get it," Rigsby said, shaking his head, totally puzzled, as he drove away from Alex Blohme huddled on the empty sidewalk.

They picked up Alex Blohme the following night at exactly nine o'clock, but instead of driving him to the downtown bar where he was to collect his money, Salvatore Jack said from the back seat,

"The name of the firm you are conspiring with, Mr. Blohme?"

Alex Blohme mumbled, "T-Torrance. Torrance Radio."

Salvadore seemed satisfied. "All right, Mr. Blohme, the plans. Give them to me!"

Alex Blohme started to turn so he could see into the back seat.

"Hit him!" Salvadore Jack roared.

Rigsby did. He chopped a short blow into Alex Blohme's middle. Then he yanked a briefcase from Blohme's hands and flipped it back to Salvadore Jack.

"Mr. Blohme," Salvadore Jack said, "need I remind you that you are a thief, and to go to your father now is to put yourself in a helluva fix?"

Blohme straightened slowly. He winced and cringed against the door. "W-what are you going to do with the plans? They are—they are very valuable."

Salvadore Jack chuckled. "Mr. Blohme, we shall see just how valuable. All right, kid, pitch him out. We've got what we want."

Rigsby knew what Salvadore Jack was going to do with the radio plans, but he wasn't sure about the amount until they had returned to his apartment. Salvadore didn't even bother to look at the plans. He merely laughed contentedly to himself and mixed a

drink. "Remember that ruby that was ransomed for twenty-five G's, kid?"

Rigsby didn't.

Salvadore Jack laughed. "Down in Florida. It was in all the papers." He laughed again. "Well, I have to hit the sack. I have to be sharp tomorrow. Very sharp."

The next morning he was already on the telephone when Rigsby padded from the bedroom into the front room. He was laughing. "Yes, Mr. Blohme, that's right," he said. He winked at Rigsby, pointed to the coffee on the tray. "All I need to know is how much you want to pay to stop me from selling to someone else." He listened, sighed. "Yes, Mr. Blohme, I realize you can go to the police, I realize you have been a victim of theft—but the point is, *how much?*"

He waited this time and Rigsby could hear the man at the other end of the line rattling, but he couldn't make out the words. Salvadore Jack became stone, his face a mask. "Thirty thousand? Well now, Mr. Blohme, that's an attractive figure—and I will consider it. You will hear from me later."

He put the phone down, leaned back in his chair. "Father Blohme," he said. He stretched his legs as Rigsby poured coffee. "Sometimes it's a strain, kid, doing business

so early in the day. A real strain."

Then he picked up the phone again, dialed another number and asked for Mr. Albert Torrance.

Either Albert Torrance had somehow already heard about the theft or was a man who lunged at opportunity. He didn't seem to quibble about whether or not Salvatore Jack really had the radio plans. All he was interested in was price.

Salvatore Jack said flatly, "Fifty thousand, Mr. Torrance. In cash."

Only then did Albert Torrance seem to seek assurance, and Salvatore Jack said, "Certainly you will be allowed to examine the papers, Mr. Torrance—while I'm counting the cash."

"Tonight, Mr. Torrance. Nine o'clock. St. Anne's." Salvatore Jack hesitated, grinned. "You come to the confessional and tell me all your troubles. Bring the cash with you."

"A church?" Rigsby said, unable to hide his surprise when Salvatore Jack had put the phone down.

Salvatore chuckled. "There are three priests at St. Anne's, boy—and one got himself in a corner once. You ever been in a confessional, kid? There's very little light. It's difficult to recognize someone. You're *not supposed* to recognize anyone."

"But can you trust this priest? I mean, fifty thousand is a lotta—"

"I can trust him," Salvatore-Jack said. "He wants to continue to be a priest. Anyway, we're not going to be too far from him at any time."

"Cops? What if Torrance brings cops?"

"Why would he?"

"Well, he might be a straight kook."

"You're not thinking again, kid. Torrance already had made a deal with Alex Blohme. Does that sound like he's straight?"

Salvatore made another phone call. He started to get some argument from the priest, but he cut him off short. They were set. All they had to do was wait. Rigsby thought night and nine o'clock never would arrive, but finally they were at the church. It was huge and warm and quiet as he and Salvatore Jack knelt in a pew while a young priest soft-shoed back to the confessional without looking at them.

A man came into the church alone at exactly nine o'clock and went straight to the confessional. He had a briefcase under his arm. Five minutes later, the man left the confessional with another briefcase, and the young priest soft-shoed back to the altar and disappeared.

Rigsby followed Salvadore Jack to the confessional. They seemed to be alone in the church now. Salvadore came out with a grin and a bulky briefcase. He unzipped it, looked inside, chuckled. Then he jerked with surprise at the clicking sound—but Rigsby was sure Salvadore Jack never saw the knife before the blade entered his body.

Salvadore went up on his toes, his face caught in a mixture of anger and pain. He dropped the briefcase. He attempted a judo chop but the chop lacked punch. "Kid . . ." he gasped, "How come you all of a sudden started thinking?"

Salvadore started to slump. His fingers found Rigsby's wrist. Surprisingly, his grip was hard. Then, slowly, the grip eased and Salvadore Jack slid down to the floor of the church.

Rigsby yanked the briefcase out from under the body, gathered the money that had spilled, stuffed it into the case, and bolted.

Mexico, here I come, his mind screamed. I'm free! I'm free! No

more squeeze. I'm off the hook . . .

The first cop to grab Rigsby was a huge shadow moving in from his right. A shout ripped from Rigsby's throat and he spun. Then other arms encircled him and he was being wrestled to the ground. He struggled in terror but he was no match, in spite of his size. When he was stretched out flat on his back, he was staring up into the face of the young priest.

"I'm sorry, son," the priest said in a soft voice. "I'm sorry you had to be involved."

"Why?" Rigsby bleated, still struggling, still hoping for a miracle that might free him.

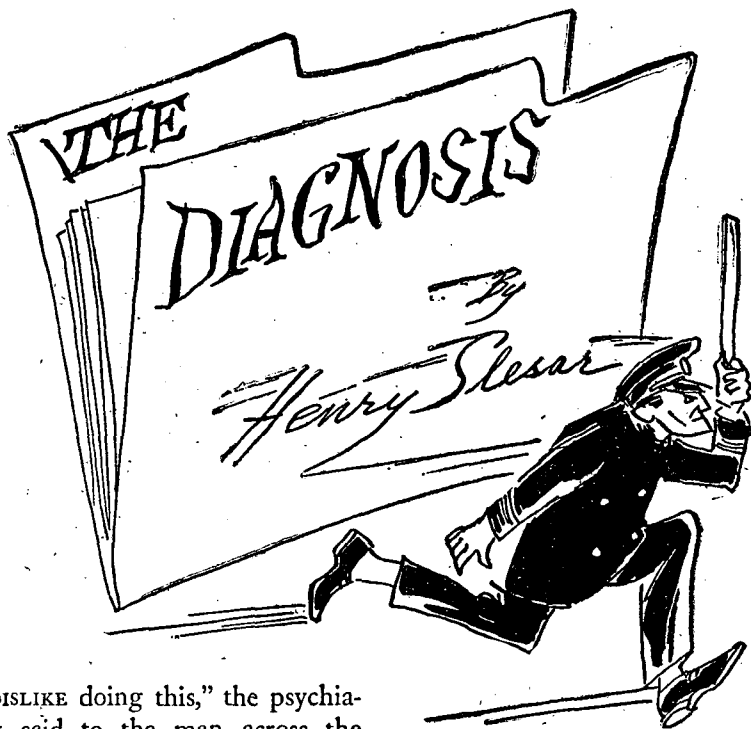
"I had to call in the police, son," the priest said. "Confession is good for the soul."

Maybe his soul, but sure as hell not mine, Rigsby thought.

He continued to struggle against the grips that held him, and he cursed Salvadore Jack for not telling him that some people won't stay in a corner forever. Some people fight out—or confess and walk out.



Diagnosis, per se, might influence one to "make an end the sooner."



I DISLIKE doing this," the psychiatrist said to the man across the desk, but there was no complaining whine in his voice. Mr. White had not only been generous in his payment of the fee, he had been prompt. Dr. Lansing simply felt obliged to make an ethical statement. After all, White had sent the

patient to him, he rationalized.

"Ordinarily," he said, "I wouldn't approve of a time limit on a case of this nature. The treatment, for instance, can't be measured in

so many days or weeks, and if—”

“Pardon me,” White interrupted. He was a forceful man with a deep, commanding voice. Even Dr. Lansing felt its influence. “It’s not treatment I’m interested in,” he said. “Just diagnosis. I want to know if it’s true, what I felt about Kenny.”

Lansing hesitated, and then decided to be succinct. “It’s true, I’m afraid. Your friend’s syndrome—I mean by that, his collection of symptoms—is definitely in a classic pattern. He commits crimes, not because of a desire for the stolen merchandise, but out of a psychopathic need for punishment. It’s a phenomenon we’ve observed in many criminals and would-be criminals. Crime is a means to an end that they themselves don’t comprehend.

“Of course, in the two brief sessions with Kenny, I could only gather the surface facts, but the facts are clear enough to allow a judgment. When Kenny was a child, his parents were abusive to each other. As often happens, Kenny’s mother was a greater source of love and affection, so he took sides with his mother against the father. Then one day, not long after an emotional outburst in which Kenny, in his own words, ‘told the old man off,’ his father was killed in an auto accident. Kenny’s sense

of guilt was extreme. He felt he had wished for the ‘old man’s’ death and, somehow, a wicked demon had overheard and made the wish come true.

“Then, of course, some practical problems made the situation even worse. After his father’s death, his mother ran off with another man, deserting Kenny. Again, he felt he was somehow to blame for that desertion. That was when he committed his first crime, the petty theft that first landed him in prison. I can tell you without a doubt that Kenny *wanted* to go to



jail. Apprehension was everything.

“The process became fairly inevitable after that, since no one tried to halt its course with psychiatric treatment. When Kenny was re-

leased from prison, he engaged in more ambitious criminal undertakings—inevitably, they led to his capture. No matter how great a show he made of trying to avoid the law, the fact was simply that Kenny didn't *want* to escape. In the last robbery he committed, the one which sentenced him to three years, Kenny really had no strong desire for his share of the money that came his way. Notice the way he spent it, lavishly, even foolishly. As a matter of fact, the very manner of his spending was the factor which led to his arrest.

"No, Mr. White," Dr. Lansing said. "To some people, and even to himself, Kenny may seem like a hardened professional criminal. But it's clear to me that, underneath it all, he's still a frightened little boy, wanting to be spanked for his wrongdoing. He ventures into crime with only one wish—to be caught."

White stood up, and extended a firm hand. It might have been carved out of mahogany. Dr. Lansing shook it, and then saw him to the door.

White went directly to the La-Salle Street hotel. When he walked into the room, Chick and the two local boys were playing poker. He said, "Where's Kenny?"

"In there," Chick said. "Sleeping."

White went into the bedroom and shook Kenny's shoulder until the younger man awoke.

"Pack your stuff," he said. "You're out of this."

"What? What?" Kenny said thickly. "What for, Whitey? What did I do wrong?"

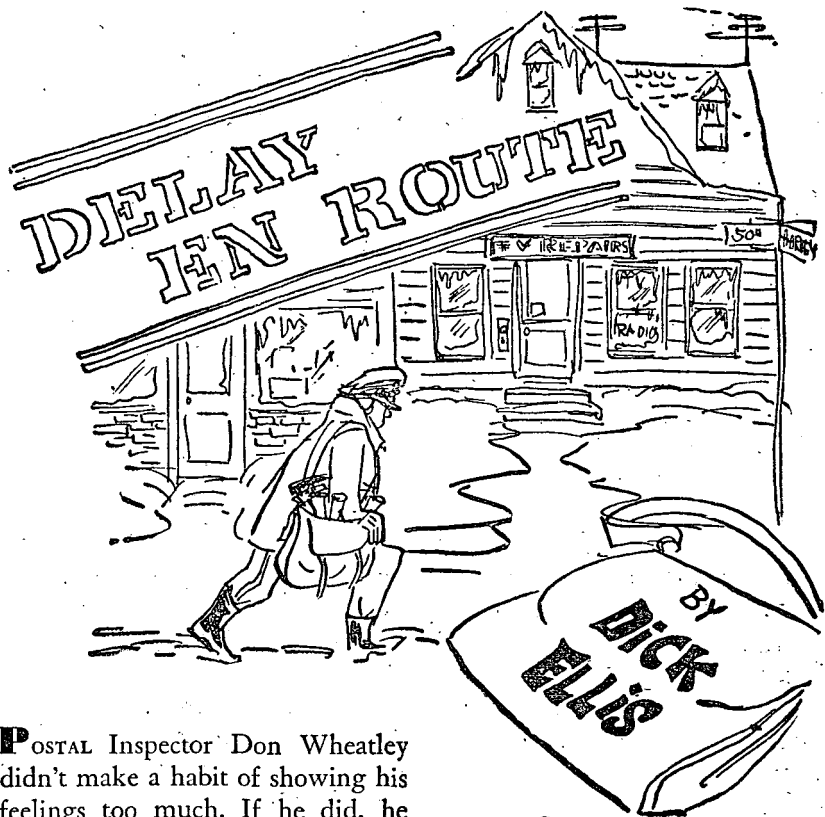
"This job's too big, sonny. I planned it too long to have it loused up by some psycho."

"Listen, Whitey, if that head-shrinker—"

"Chick," White said quietly, and Chick came to the doorway, holding a poker hand. He snapped the cards against his big knuckles, and Kenny swallowed hard, got up, stuffed some clothes in a bag, and left. Then White and Chick returned to the livingroom, and talked over the forthcoming payroll job with the ease and confidence of professionals.



Elements known to meteorology may not disrupt the flow of mail, but certainly there is more than one chemical element capable of doing so . . .



POSTAL Inspector Don Wheatley didn't make a habit of showing his feelings too much. If he did, he would've been cursing at the top of his voice as he drove north along the snow-swept city street. Instead, he said quietly, "I sure blew this one."

"It could still be an accident, a

hit and run job," the man riding beside Wheatley said. "Even if it comes up murder, it might have nothing to do with the mail-stealing bit."

Wheatley grimaced. "You really think so, Fred?"

Fred Thomas, also a postal inspector, stared out at the dismal gray winter morning. He shook his head.

They reached an intersection and Wheatley turned left onto a residential street. He checked the rear-view mirror, saw that the red, white and blue Post Office wagon had also made the turn. There were only a couple blocks to go now.

Wheatley tried to get his thoughts in some kind of order. It had never occurred to him that Smithson was in any danger—except from the Post Office Department.

Of course, if he'd known about the shipment of diamonds, he'd have played it differently, but that had come out only this morning. The city police had called just minutes later, at eleven o'clock, to report that a letter carrier identified as Harold Smithson had been found dead in the street about midway along his route in the northern section of the city.

Smithson appeared to be the victim of a hit and run driver—yet the patrol car officers who were the first on the scene didn't think so. Neither did Postal Inspector Don Wheatley. Well, he'd soon know for sure.

Up ahead he could see a couple of city police cars and an ambulance parked at an angle on the ice-coated street. Red blinker lights made spots of color against the pervading grayness of the winter day. Wheatley parked behind a patrol car and he and Thomas got out. The wind hit them like an icy fist. They slogged toward a huddle of men gathered near the open rear doors of the ambulance.

A big guy, bundled in a shaggy overcoat that made him resemble a grizzly bear, came to meet them. Wheatley recognized him as Lieutenant Gaines of the city homicide bureau.

The three men exchanged short greetings, then Wheatley asked, "What's the deal?"

"You tell me," Gaines rumbled. "The ambulance doc's still examining the body. The postman, Smithson, was run over by a car, but it sure as hell wasn't an accident. It was done somewhere else and the body brought here and dumped. Who'd want to kill a postman?"

Before Wheatley could reply, the Post Office station wagon crunched to a stop behind Wheatley's car. Two men were inside, a messenger-driver and a substitute letter carrier who might, or might not—depending on the circumstances—finish making mail deliveries along the rest of the dead man's route.

Wheatley gestured to them to stay put for the moment. Then he and Thomas walked with Gaines toward the group near the ambulance.

"A dame found the body a few minutes before eleven and called in," Gaines said. "She was backing out of her driveway there—nearly run over the guy herself before she spotted him. There's not much traffic on this street, particularly on a lousy day like this, but he couldn't have been lying there very long; a few minutes."

Fred Thomas asked, "You're sure it wasn't an accident?"

"Yeah," Gaines told him. "First place, the body's a mess—crushed chest and so on—but there's hardly any blood on the street under it. And his boots are clean. They'd be clogged with snow if he'd walked here."

They reached the little group of uniformed and plainclothes police. In the center a young man with white pants showing beneath the skirts of his overcoat was crouching above the corpse.

Harold Smithson lay on his back, his stiffening arms outflung, the front of his heavy grayish-blue coat splotched with rapidly freezing blood. As Gaines had said, the body was a mess. The leather mail pouch lay near the dead man's head. Its flap was buckled down.

Wheatley bent forward, studied the body for a long moment. A light powder of snow covered the body, including the wide open, bulging eyes. The inspector picked up the mail pouch. "Has anyone fooled with this?"

"Huh-uh," Gaines shook his head. "We figured that was you guys' department."

Now the doctor rose to his feet. He wiped his hands on a cloth from his medical bag, and said, "Well, he's got a knot on the crown of his head that doesn't fit the pattern of the other injuries. In my opinion he was slugged, then stretched out somewhere on a concrete floor—looks like particles of cement on the back of his clothes—and a car driven over his unconscious body. Killed him almost at once."

"Time?" Wheatley asked.

"At a very rough guess, I'd say between half an hour and an hour ago."

Wheatley looked at his watch. It was eleven-twenty. He raised his glance, looked around the area. There were very few houses in this block, and those few were set far back from the street. It was probably the most nearly deserted spot on the dead man's route.

Carrying the mail pouch, Wheatley started for his car. He was trembling with cold. He said,



"Lieutenant, you want to sit in the car with Fred and me for a minute?"

Gaines nodded. "Be right with you." He turned to give orders to

his men, and the group broke up.

At the car, Wheatley gratefully slid inside, with Fred Thomas right behind. In a moment Gaines hurried over and got in the back

seat, rubbing his hands briskly. "Wonder if this weather will ever break?" he growled. "I don't think I'd recognize the sun if I saw it."

"Yeah," Wheatley agreed. Carefully, not wanting to antagonize the city cop, he said, "I'm sure you've done all the routine stuff."

The lieutenant grunted. "Pictures, measurements, questioning the people living around here—none of them saw a thing, evidently. We searched the area, but of course didn't come up with anything. There is one thing that may help. From marks on the body, the car that ran over him had snow chains on its tires, and there are sure to be fragments of his wool overcoat entangled in the links of the chains. If the killer doesn't think to take the chains off, that could help us to nail him down. Provided we find a suspect, that is. What about it?"

Wheatley frowned at the frosted windshield. "No suspect, I'm afraid. Not for the murder."

"What do you mean?" Gaines asked, leaning forward and crossing his massive arms on the back of the front seat.

"We'll get to that in a minute," Wheatley said. "First I want to check Smithson's mail pouch." He unbuckled the flap and turned it back. Inside were several fat stacks

of letters, each stack bound by a leather thong, magazines, the usual junk mail, a few small parcels. Wheatley glanced at the address on the top letter of the top stack. He read, "1448 West 50th—that's a block over and two blocks down the street . . ."

He shut his eyes, thought about the map of Smithson's route. He'd examined the route map several times in the last couple of weeks.

He mused, "That's a mixture along there. Apartment houses, private residences, quite a few small stores and shops." Opening his eyes, he turned to Gaines. "If you have a couple of men to spare, how about sending them over to that block—the 1400 blocks on 50th—and ask them to work back to the east until they find the last address where Smithson made a delivery this morning."

Gaines blinked. Then he nodded. "I get it. Somewhere between his last delivery and the address on that letter you've got there, will be where whatever happened—happened."

"It's a start anyway."

Gaines grunted his way out of the car, plodded over to speak to two plainclothesmen who were watching the ambulance attendants load the body into the ambulance.

"You going to give it all to him?" Thomas asked.

Wheatley nodded. "You know what the great white father in Washington says—always cooperate fully with all law enforcement agencies. Besides, Gaines is a good cop."

As he talked, Wheatley was rifling through the stack of letters in his hands. Suddenly he stopped. Then, with a muffled curse, he began to go through the stack again.

Thomas stared at him curiously. "Find something?"

"The simplest thing, and no one thought of it."

"What—"

"The postmarks. Look at the postmarks."

Gaines returned while Inspector Thomas was examining a stack of letters. The lieutenant got back into the car and rubbed his gloved hands together.

"I see what you mean, Don," Fred Thomas said.

"What's going on?" Gaines wanted to know.

Wheatley ignored him for the moment. To Thomas he said, "How about you take the pouch into the office. You can use the station wagon. Take the substitute carrier in with you. Give the scoop to the chief, and see what he wants to do—seal this pouch and hold it, or send it on out. But first, go through all the mail and be sure we're right."

"We're right," Thomas sighed. "What about you?"

"I'll fill in Gaines. After that, I don't know. Yet."

As Thomas got out, he said, "You know if we hold up this mail, we're going to hear about it."

"If the customers start complaining, tell them there's been a delay en route. Which is true enough."

Thomas left the car, smiling wryly. He got into the post office wagon and it pulled away down the street.

"If it isn't asking too much," Gaines said angrily, "maybe you'd let me know what the—"

"Yes." Wheatley turned on the seat, looking back at the big cop. "What that was about, we just discovered how Harold Smithson has been stealing mail. We've been trying to find out for the last couple of weeks. I've been in charge of the case—and flubbed it good and proper."

Gaines scowled. "You mean Smithson was stealing mail he was supposed to be delivering?"

"That's it, although we weren't sure enough to rack Smithson up, because we couldn't figure out how he was doing it. Not since we began to get onto him. That was a little over two weeks ago, when we began to get complaints from patrons on his route. Checks, money orders, even cash they were sup-

posed to have received, but hadn't. We recovered a couple of the checks. The endorsements had been forged, and the checks cashed at various places around the city, but we couldn't get a lead on who had cashed them." Wheatley paused to light a cigarette.

"Didn't you at least ask Smithson about it?"

"Sure we did," Wheatley replied. "We gave him hell. We put tails on him, went through his background with a fine-tooth comb, but we didn't get anywhere. We tried planting letters in his pouch—letters that obviously contained checks or cash. Some were delivered, some weren't. Several days, another inspector and I watched Smithson from the minute he entered the Post Office in the morning, all the time he was sorting his mail into stacks, and on out here on his route. Then we followed him clear around his route, and the moment he finished, we stopped him and searched him. Nothing. The guy just laughed at us—not to mention threatening to sue us for damages to his character if we didn't get off his back."

"At least twice when we pulled that routine, mail disappeared that should have been delivered, but the thing was—how? There was always the chance that Smithson had nothing to do with it, that some

clever gang of mailbox pilferers had thought up a new gimmick."

Gaines snorted. "So you just let the guy go right on stealing the public blind. You could have at least suspended him, or fired him."

"Not without some definite evidence. Huh-uh. Until this morning, we didn't have information of any major theft. No single one of the stolen items amounted to more than fifty or sixty dollars, at least none that we know about so far. However, others may turn up, and probably will."

"What happened this morning?"

Wheatley sighed, took a drag from his cigarette. "A guy called the office, raising hell. Runs a small jewelry shop just a few blocks from here. He was supposed to get a packet containing \$7,500 worth of cut diamonds yesterday, or today at the latest—but he didn't get them. He called the office just a minute or two after Smithson had passed his shop without stopping."

"Wait a second," Gaines put in. "Diamonds? Weren't they registered, insured, something like that?"

Wheatley shook his head. "No. Just put in a little box, wrapped in plain brown paper, and sent first-class mail. Jewelers often do that—a lot more often than they'd want the general public to know. Of

course, almost always the shipments go through with no trouble. But not this time. That was too much for the chief inspector. We talked it over and decided to pull Smithson in. Later on, if we couldn't find something to nail him with, he could sue Uncle Sam and be damned. I was just about to start here to pick him up when you people called."

The two men smoked in silence for a moment. Wheatley saw that it had stopped snowing, but the sky was still gray and thick with clouds.

"How did you get onto Smithson?" Gaines asked.

Wheatley made a face. "I just happened to glance at the postmarks on those letters a while ago. They were all one day older than they should have been. That was the mail Smithson should have delivered yesterday."

"I don't understand."

"Yeah. It's so obvious that I didn't think of it either. Smithson was switching his whole pouch of mail somewhere on his route. He had a partner—almost surely the person who knocked him off this morning—and all he had to do was hand him the pouch containing today's mail. The partner handed Smithson an exactly similar pouch, containing yesterday's mail. You see? It would take only a second to

make the switch. Then they'd have till tomorrow morning to go through the mail and pick out a few choice items."

The radio on the dashboard of the car sputtered to life. It was Inspector Thomas calling from the main Post Office downtown. All the mail in Smithson's pouch had been checked. All should have been delivered the day before.

Wheatley acknowledged the call, put the mike back on its hook, and said, "That's that."

"Except for the little matter of who killed the guy," Gaines said. "And why—since everything was going so smooth."

The postal inspector tugged thoughtfully at the tip of his large nose. "I can think of several reasons why. The diamonds—maybe the partner didn't want to split them with Smithson. Or he was afraid Smithson would spill the beans if we kept after him long enough, which we were bound to do when the diamonds turned up missing . . ."

"Well, what now?" Gaines asked.

Wheatley blinked at the street ahead; he'd just noticed that all the other cars and the ambulance had pulled out. No, there was one car, the lieutenant's, half hidden in the gloom.

"I'd like to check with those men you sent to find the last place

Smithson made a delivery," Wheatley said.

"Okay. I'll ride with you. Stop by my car there, and I'll tell my driver to tag along."

They got to the 1400 block on 50th Street a few minutes later, and finally found Gaines' men two blocks farther east. They were in a corner cafe, thawing out with hot coffee.

"What're you doing in here?" Gaines growled.

"This is the place," one of the plainclothesmen said. "Long as we were here, we thought—"

"You mean this is the last spot that Smithson delivered mail?" Wheatley broke in. "You sure?"

"Far as we could find out," the man said.

Frowning, Wheatley turned to the cafe window and peered westward. Two blocks, without a delivery? He couldn't buy that. There were several stores on those blocks, a couple of big apartment houses, private residences—no. He turned, crossed to the counter. A man wearing a soiled apron looked at him, and the others, curiously.

"You received mail this morning?" Wheatley questioned.

"Yeah, a couple bills—that's all I ever get is bills," the counterman told him. "Why?"

"Could I see them? The envelopes."

Wonderingly, the counterman turned to a shelf, picked up two letters and handed them to Wheatley. He saw they were utility bills, postmarked locally yesterday afternoon. Wheatley stared at the postmarks. There was no mistake.

Gaines was looking over the inspector's shoulder. "What is it?"

"Unless our killer is a real clever fella, the place where he exchanged mail pouches with Smithson is within the two blocks between this cafe and number 1448."

"Huh?"

Wheatley flung the envelopes on the counter, nodded thanks to the man behind it, and said to Gaines, "I'll explain outside. It's a little crowded in here."

When they reached the sidewalk, Wheatley turned up his overcoat collar, jammed his hands into his pockets, and said, "Up to this point Smithson was delivering today's mail. But all the mail in his pouch was yesterday's. You see?"

"Yeah," Gaines said. "You mean the bag we found beside the body was full of yesterday's stuff."

"Right. But up to here he was delivering mail he brought out from the Post Office this morning. So—"

Gaines broke in with rising excitement, "Hey, that means the place where the switch was made could be the very next stop, don't

it? Right across the street there."

Wheatley shook his head slowly. "I doubt it. They wouldn't have been that careless. The drop is probably at least half a block on, maybe more than that. Or—wait—yes, that makes more sense. The drop isn't up ahead. It's behind us, between here and the beginning of Smithson's route, which is six blocks on to the east, at Harvey and 50th."

Gaines took off his hat, glared at it, and jammed it back on his tousled gray hair. He transferred the glare to Wheatley. "Can't you federal dicks ever make up your mind about anything?"

Wheatley laughed. "Hardly ever. Come on."

He led the way to the car. Gaines, after telling his men to stand by in the cafe, followed after. Wheatley started the car and they moved slowly east along 50th Street.

It was much the same type of middle-class neighborhood as that westward, but with a larger proportion of shops as they neared the major traffic artery that was Harvey Boulevard.

"Yeah," Wheatley said, more to himself than to his companion. "That's why the killer pulled the mail for those two blocks—to get our attention away from the area this side of the cafe—though of

course he was hoping we'd accept Smithson's death as a hit-run accident in the first place."

The lieutenant grunted, still a little huffy. "Too bad you big brains didn't figure all this out before the guy was killed, you know?"

"I know," Wheatley sighed. "It was mostly my fault. I was looking for some complicated gimmick; a case of not seeing the forest for the trees. It never occurred to anyone that Smithson might be in physical danger."

Something kept nagging at the back of his mind, but he couldn't bring it out. They passed a large brick business building that had been cut up into several small shops. One of them belonged to the irate jeweler who'd called the Postal Inspection Service offices shortly before eleven o'clock. Suddenly the nagging thought burst into full bloom.

Wheatley pulled to the curb opposite the building, and stopped. He leaned his chin on top of his fists on the steering wheel.

Gaines gave him a worried look. "You sick?"

Wheatley shook his head. He didn't speak. He was trying to remember exactly what time the jeweler had called, and what he had said. It couldn't have been much earlier than ten-forty-five. Yes, he

was sure the jeweler had told him that Smithson had just passed by on the sidewalk outside his shop.

He turned to Gaines. "What time did the woman who found the body phone into headquarters? Exactly what time?"

Gaines thought a moment. "Right around five minutes till eleven. Yeah. I was out here by eleven, and radioed headquarters to notify you people. Why?"

Wheatley explained. "You see? That leaves only about ten minutes for Smithson to deliver his route from here to the cafe—three blocks away—and from there to meet his partner; for the partner to attack him, knock him out and kill him; then transport the body to where it was found. Ten minutes at the outside. Come on. Let's go over and check with the jeweler."

The jeweler, a bony little man named Stein, was positive he had called the inspectors' offices not more than a minute or two after Smithson had gone by his shop.

"You're sure it was Smithson?" asked Wheatley.

Stein raised his eyebrows. "I don't know from Smithson. I just saw the postman going by, late as usual. He was all bundled up, wearing earmuffs yet, with his cap pulled down and his collar turned up. The postman. Who else?"

"Yeah, who else?" Gaines asked,

when he and Wheatley were back on the street. "The killer? That's crazy."

But it didn't appear so crazy after they had checked with the other stores in the business block, and found a couple that had received mail that morning. One of these had paid enough attention to the letter carrier to realize it wasn't the regular man, but he hadn't thought anything about it.

"Was he wearing a Post Office uniform?" Wheatley asked.

"Sure, I guess so. Cap with that little badge on it, and a heavy gray coat, and all."

"What did he look like?"

"I don't know. Just a guy. Couldn't see much of his face. I just saw it wasn't the usual postman, is all. I think he had on glasses. Yeah, and a little mustache."

Wheatley headed for his car, ignoring Gaines, who plodded alongside, muttering to himself.

They drove back to the cafe. It was the same story. The counter-man had a vague idea that the postman that morning wasn't the same one he was used to seeing, but who paid any attention to a postman?

Wheatley made two phone calls from the cafe: one to his office, asking Fred Thomas to do some fast research and call him back, the second to the city bus company.

Then he came over and sat down at a table where Gaines and his men were waiting. Wheatley shrugged out of his coat, and took a swig of steaming coffee the lieutenant had ordered for him. He lit a cigarette and inhaled deeply.

"The bus that comes out Harvey from downtown was running on time this morning, in spite of the lousy weather," he said. "The one that Smithson always rode to the point where his route starts reached the intersection with 50th Street at ten-ten. The company is checking now with the driver of that bus to see if Smithson was on it this morning, as usual. I'm betting that he was. Assuming that, he got off the bus at ten-ten, and thirty-five minutes later, someone dressed as a carrier—but not Smithson—passed by Mr. Stein's place, and made deliveries in stores beyond it. You can see why the killer had to take that risk. Making deliveries, I mean, as far as the cafe here."

Gaines and the plainclothesmen just looked at Wheatley.

"Hell, he simply couldn't afford not to," Wheatley said, and gulped down more coffee. "He must be some guy. A mixture of cunning and stupidity. Like me, huh?" For the first time that morning he gave out a genuine laugh. There was a glint in his usually mild blue eyes.

The phone on the cafe's back wall rang. Wheatley got up, hurried to answer it. The call was from the bus company. Yes, the driver of the bus that hit Harvey and 50th at ten-ten o'clock definitely remembered that Smithson had been a passenger. The driver had especially noticed because Harold Smithson had appeared to be quite nervous and upset. The driver had to remind Smithson when they reached his stop.

Wheatley expressed his thanks, and hung up the phone.

At once it rang again. Fred Thomas, this time. He said, "Don? I'm not even going to ask how you knew—or what difference it makes—but there is a one-time letter-carrier who lives on 50th, just west of Harvey. He has some kind of radio and TV repair shop there, with living quarters over it. A little joint that he runs by himself."

Wheatley took in a deep breath, let it out slowly. It had been the heck of a long shot, but it looked as if it might pay off. Maybe. He asked, "What's his name?"

"Jenner. Robert Jenner. He quit the department a couple years ago, under something of a cloud. Nothing positive, but our file on him indicates there was some suspicion he'd been pilfering mail. He quit before our boys got anything on him."

"Sounds good," Wheatley said. "Okay. Thanks, Fred. I'll be calling in shortly."

"One last thing," Thomas added. "This Robert Jenner had only one close friend among the other carriers."

"Harold Smithson?"

"Harold Smithson."

Again Wheatley replaced the phone on its hook. He stood there a moment, staring at the wall. Then he went back to the table and looked down at Gaines.

"You fellas want to take a ride? There's a chance it'll be the last one, on this case."

As Inspector Thomas had said, Jenner's radio shop was a scant half-block west of Harvey. It was a dingy place, the repair shop being located in the lower floor of what had once been a frame house.

Wheatley pulled to the curb a short distance the other side of the place. "Notice the sign on the front door?"

"Yeah. Closed for lunch," Gaines said.

"Or maybe closed while the owner does a cleanup job in that garage behind the joint there. Let's take a look."

Gaines snapped, "Hold your horses. I've gone along with you, but now I want to know where we're going. I understand your line of thought—up to a point. You've

decided that the killer has a location somewhere between Harvey and this Stein's jewelry store, and that when Smithson reached the location this morning, the killer knocked him off, took his body over where it was found and dumped him, along with the mail sack containing most of yesterday's mail. Okay. Then he came home and put on something that looked like a Post Office uniform, and took enough of the fresh mail Smithson had with him to reach to that cafe five blocks up the street, in order to pull attention away from this area. Okay. But—"

"That was the one really bad bust he made," Wheatley cut in. "Being too darn greedy to put the pouch with the fresh mail in it alongside the body."

Gaines removed his hat and examined it carefully. Then he crammed it back onto his head. He snapped, "But why fasten onto this Robert Jenner?"

"Because he used to be a letter carrier," Wheatley said, "and because he and Smithson are known to have been friendly. Sure, I may be completely wrong again. It won't be the first time. Not even the first time today."

With a sigh, Gaines opened his door and stepped out. He said, "Come on, boys."

Leaving the car, the four men

walked back toward the shabby two-story frame building.

"I remember this place from the times we tailed Smithson on his route," Wheatley muttered. "He was never inside more than a few seconds. Just long enough."

The lieutenant grunted.

The door bearing the sign 'Closed for lunch' was locked. Wheatley rattled the knob, pounded on the door. No answer.

After a brief conference, Gaines stationed one of his men to watch the door. The rest of them went along the side of the building toward the garage. The ground here was covered with snow over a bottom layer of ice.

As they neared the ramshackle garage they heard the sound of running water. Someone inside was using a hose.

Gaines scowled at Wheatley. "Sheer dumb luck."

The inspector replied softly, "Don't be counting chickens just yet . . ."

Wide double-doors fronting the garage were closed and barred from the inside, but there was a

smaller door in a side wall, and it was open.

Wheatley gave the door an abrupt shove and stepped into the frigid, dimly lit interior of the garage, followed by Gaines and the other man. A man was in there, his back to the door. He was busily hosing down the concrete floor. Beyond him stood an old sedan. There were snow chains on its tires.

Wheatley glanced once at the floor, and noticed the ugly stains that the water had not yet washed away.

Now the man started violently, dropped the hose, and wheeled around to face them. He wasn't wearing glasses and he didn't have a mustache. Wheatley hadn't figured that he would. But he did have on a pair of Post Office-gray trousers, and panicky guilt was written all over him.

He gasped, "Who—what the—"

"Hello, Mr. Jenner," said Wheatley. "We'd like to speak to you about some missing diamonds, and about an old pal of yours named Harold Smithson . . ."



*Contingent upon one's viewpoint, the long way around still
may be the shortest way home.*



TRAIN RIDE

by W. Sherwood Hartman

WE DIDN'T talk much the first day. Both of us just sort of stared out the train window and watched the countryside slide by in an endless panorama. My companion was a stockily built man, about five-ten, and seemed to be embarrassed about the whole thing. I couldn't blame him. It wasn't his fault that his left hand was handcuffed to my right. He kept his topcoat across our wrists whenever possible, so the other passengers wouldn't notice. He was doing an unpleasant job, but when it was over, he could go back . . . My prospects were a lot less promising. I was on my way to the West Coast for an appointment with the gas chamber . . . Like I said, we didn't talk

much the first day, just stared.

The second day, it was different. Being chained together like we were, you almost have to talk about something or you'll get bored to death. We talked a lot the second day.

His name was Joe Biasone. He had been on the Philadelphia police force for twenty-two years and was a sergeant. His son was a lieutenant in the air force and was stationed in Viet Nam. His son's wife and the two grandchildren were staying with Joe and his wife until the son got back. He had a daughter who was a senior in college, and a little girl (Joanie-come-lately, he called her) who was only three years old. He was

forty-seven, and he didn't relish the idea of being away from his family for two weeks to escort a punk like me to the West Coast, but he didn't seem to be mad at me. He just seemed to be unhappy with the whole system.

Of course, I talked too. I told him about Eddie and the job we had pulled, and about how Eddie had killed the man . . . But I guess I'd better start at the beginning.

I'd met Eddie at a bar in San Francisco. I didn't like him much at the time, but we were both at the end of the string and when he brought up the idea of hitting this loan office, it seemed like the last chance. The job had been a breeze, but as we were backing out of the place some jerk tried to get to the phone and Eddie had plugged him. So it was murder, and as far as the law was concerned, I was just as guilty as Eddie. We got away okay, but the guy getting killed changed our plans. Instead of splitting the loot right away, we put it in a suitcase and sent it to St. Louis, figuring to meet there six months later and pick it up. That way there'd be less chance of one of us getting drunk and loud-mouthed and blowing the deal. Also, if any of the money was hot, it would be a lot cooler in six months. We had torn the claim

check in half. Eddie had one half, I had the other. We split then, figuring there'd be less chance of us getting fingered that way than if we were together. Eddie gave me a phone number to call in Pittsburgh as a contact. His sister lived there, and we could use her to keep in touch.

I hitchhiked back to Phillie and worked as a dishwasher in a diner for about three weeks, but it started to bug me. I dig the bright lights just as much as the next guy, so I pulled a couple service station heists to tide me over. Then I pulled the prize boner—I ran a stop light. It was one of those new jobs that lets the light stay red in both directions for about fifteen seconds before it turns green. I have the habit, like a million other guys, of watching the cross-lane light and starting to ease through when it turns yellow. That's what I did, but after the yellow went out on my left, the light facing me stayed red. I was already through when I realized what had happened, but by that time it was too late. The red blinker of a cruiser car was on my tail before I was halfway through the block. I pulled over and got out my cards.

If I'd taken the ticket and mailed the fine in the next day, I wouldn't be heading west right now, but I was shook and not thinking too

good. I offered the fuzz fifty to forget the whole thing. So, what happened? He blew his stack and pulled me in for trying to bribe an officer. Then I was in real trouble. A service station attendant identified me as the guy that had robbed him (I'll swear I never saw the guy before in my life) and they sent my picture out over the wire service.

That frosted it. San Francisco had wired that they had a make on me from the loan office job, and the local judge decided it would be a waste of Pennsylvania's tax money to try me on a simple thing like armed robbery when California

had me like a sitting duck on a murder rap. So, I was riding west with Joe Biasone securely anchored to my arm with case-hardened steel cuffs.

Like I said before, we talked a lot the second day. I told Joe the whole story. He seemed to think that since Eddie had been the trigger man, I might get off with life instead of the cyanide grand finale. That doubtful outcome didn't seem especially savory to me either, so I neglected to tell him that I had phoned Eddie's sister before they knew how hot I really was. Now, Eddie I wouldn't trust anymore than a spoiled meatball, but his sister sounded okay.

"Don't sweat it, kid," she had said. "I've got contacts. Eddie'll know what train you're on. They'll never get you to the coast. Just play it cool. You can count on Eddie."

The more I thought about it, the more I figured she was right. Without my half of the claim check, the loot from the loan office job could lay in the baggage room of the St. Louis railway station until it was moldy. Nobody could touch it. If Eddie didn't spring me from this mess he stood to lose the dough, and how did he know I wouldn't turn state's evidence and twist the screw into him? Eddie had to come through.

He did. I didn't even notice



when he got on the train at Springfield. I must have been dozing while we laid over, but there he was, slouched in a seat at the other end of the car next to the door of the men's room, reading the evening paper. He never even glanced my way, but I knew what he had in mind. I sighed, slumped down in my seat and tried to sleep. Joe, my escort, was mumbling something about "Joanie-come-lately" and was already half asleep. I slept as well as you can in a coach on the way to your own execution.

I expected some action when we reached St. Louis, but nothing happened. Eddie just stayed in his seat, alternately dozing and reading. I couldn't figure what he was waiting for. The dough was in St. Louis. That would have been the logical place to make the move, but Eddie just sat in his seat and stared out the window the whole time the train laid over at the station.

Then we were rolling again, and I was too nervous to sleep or even think. Joe was slumped beside me, snoring lightly, and I noticed that Eddie was studying the railroad timetable. It was ten of four in the morning when he nodded to me, then left his seat and went into the men's room.

I nudged Joe and he was instantly awake.

"I hate to bother you, brother," I

said, "but I have to take a walk."

He grunted as we got to our feet. I held my breath as we passed through the aisle between the sleeping passengers, but he didn't notice the empty seat where Eddie had been sitting. I stepped into the men's room first. As he followed, Eddie, stationed behind the door, pushed it shut and shoved a .45 into Joe's ribs.

Joe spit a soft curse, but if he was scared he didn't show it. He ignored Eddie and looked at me. "I guess I figured you wrong, kid. You won't get away with this. You know that, don't you?"

"Don't make book on that, copper," Eddie cut in. He had the same crazy glaze in his eyes that I had seen when he cut the guy down on the loan job. "Get his gun, kid."

Joe never moved as I reached under his jacket and took the Police Positive out of his shoulder holster and put it in my trouser pocket.

"Now say your prayers," Eddie said. His knuckles were white around the grip of the .45.

"Eddie," I hissed, "don't be crazy! I'm still chained to this guy!"

"Yeah." He grinned, but it wasn't a nice grin. "Yeah, I guess you are. Okay, copper, you bought yourself a little more time. Where's the key to the cuffs?"

"I don't have the key," Joe said. "It's waiting at headquarters in San Francisco, sent ahead by air mail." There was still no fear in Joe's voice. I couldn't help admiring his guts. If I'd been in his shoes, facing a nut like Eddie, I'd have been scared toothless, but he was acting like he didn't know what fear was.

"Copper," Eddie said, still wearing that crooked grin, "you're going to take a much longer trip than the kid is. Don't you forget that!"

The train lurched then, as it started to slow for the stop at Oklahoma City. Joe and I were caught off balance and stumbled against the wall, but Eddie was braced in the corner as though he had expected it.

We waited in the men's room until the train had stopped. Then we left the car and walked through the station, with Eddie a breathless step behind us, and went to the parking lot. He had a car waiting there. Joe and I got in the back seat and Eddie drove. The traffic was light at that hour of the morning. We snaked through the city, and it wasn't long until we were on Route 66 heading back toward St. Louis. Eddie stayed close to the speed limit, and we rode in silence for about forty miles. Then he slowed down, as though looking for something. He finally spotted

his landmark and turned off onto a dirt road.

"We got no problem, kid," Eddie said. "I figured we might run into something like this, so I found us a hideout and a tool to get those cuffs off."

It was daylight now. We bumped along for about ten minutes and came to a deserted farm. The barn had long since collapsed, but the house was stubbornly standing, windowless, windswept, and gray from lack of paint. Eddie parked beside the house. Then I noticed that Joe was breathing funny. He'd take a couple real deep breaths, then gasp like he was in pain.

"You all right, Joe?" I asked.

"Yeah, kid," he answered, but his voice didn't sound right.

We got out of the car and walked around to the front of the house and up the sagging steps. Just as we stepped through the door, Joe mumbled something about "Joanie" and slumped to the floor. I caught him on the way down and helped to ease his fall. He was out cold.

"What goes with him?" Eddie asked.

"I don't know," I answered. I was on my knees beside Joe, and searched for his pulse with my free hand. For a long frightened moment, I couldn't find a thing. Then it was under my fingertips—a

crazy, weak fluttering, like a butterfly caught in a spider web. "Eddie," I said, "he's having a heart attack. We've got to get him to a hospital. He'll die sure as hell if we don't!"

Eddie laughed like I had said the funniest thing in the world. "Kid," he said, "I just can't believe you're for real! Whatever gave you the idea he was going to leave here alive anyway?" He bent over, laughing and slapping his knee. "I told you I had the tool to get you out of those cuffs. Wait 'til you see it!" He hurried through the door toward the rear of the house.

Joe's pulse seemed to be getting a little stronger. It would flutter, then beat almost regular for a few seconds, then flutter again. His eyes were opening as Eddie stepped back into the room.

"Look, kid, look at this! This is what we're going to use to get that dirty cop off your arm!" He held a meat cleaver in his right hand, the fingers of his left caressing the wicked cutting edge. The glaze was back in his eyes as he started toward Joe.

I guess I thought of Joe's son in Viet Nam; and his grandchildren, and his little "Joanie-come-lately". Maybe I didn't even think. The next thing I knew, Joe's Police Positive was bucking in my left

hand. Then it was empty, hot and smoking, and Eddie was on the floor in a bath of his own blood. The glaze was still in his eyes, but it was permanent now.

"Thanks, kid," Joe said. It was just a weak whisper. Then he passed out again.

I cried. I cried in anger, in frustration, in blubbering self-pity. I cried the whole time as I pulled, carried, dragged and hoisted Joe to the car. By the time I got him into the front seat, I was too exhausted to cry any more. I had him lying on his back, and had pulled his knees up so I could close the door. His head was propped against my right leg as I sat behind the wheel.

"Kid," he said, and I realized he was conscious again, "loosen my belt."

It was awkward, left-handed, but I managed to open it. Even then, I didn't notice the adhesive tape on the underside of his belt buckle. I shifted my position and tried to reach the switch key to start the car.

"The key to the handcuffs—it's under the buckle," he said. Then he was gone again.

I got the cuffs off and headed back toward Oklahoma City. When I got to the main highway, I opened the car up. It wasn't long before I heard a siren behind me, and I pulled off the road. When

the highway patrolman saw the shape Joe was in, I had an escort to the nearest hospital.

I should have cut out after I got Joe to the hospital, but I didn't. I waited outside his room until they said he'd be okay. Then I started to leave, but one of the nurses called me back. "Your friend wants to talk to you," she said, "but you can stay only a few minutes."

Joe didn't look stocky now. He looked little, shiny-white and helpless under the cellophane tent. I could barely make out his words.

"I'm not going to turn you in, kid. I can't do it. But why don't you give yourself up? It would be better that way."

I didn't answer right away. I thought about the gas chamber. I thought about a trial. I thought about living behind bars. Even if I got out, I'd be wearing the ex-con label for the rest of my life. "Would it, Joe?" I asked. "Do you honestly think it would be better that way?"

"I don't know, kid," he sighed. "Honest, I don't know, but whatever you do, write once in a while. At least let me know where you

are. You will write, kid, please?"

"Sure, Joe, I'll write."

He smiled then, and went to sleep.

I left the room and threaded my way through the corridors until I found the exit. Eddie's car was where I had left it in the parking lot. I started toward it, then turned and walked away . . . I could have gone back and gotten the other half of the claim check off Eddie's body, but what was the use? I pulled my half out of its hiding place in my wallet and tore it into tiny pieces, letting them fall on the street like stray bits of used confetti as I walked toward the sound of train whistles.

I wondered as I walked if it would have been any different if they had assigned another cop to escort me to the West Coast instead of my brother Joe. I never gave him much reason to be proud of me, but I wonder if I would have let Eddie cut off a man's hand, any man's, just so we could get to that money. I'll never know, but I'll do like I promised. I'll write to Joe once in a while.



Would it be paranoid, perhaps, to suggest that parapsychological insight might be construed as invasion of privacy?

The Tuesday Club

by
C. B. Gilford



LEONA Coston would never have returned to the house if she hadn't forgotten something. And if she hadn't returned, she would never have dreamed what her husband was up to. And likewise, she would never have contemplated murder.

She had meant to bring along that cute little piece of Danish pottery she'd discovered in that out-of-the-way shop. Alice's birthday was on Friday, but the girls were going to celebrate on this, their regular Tuesday night out, and here she

had gone off and left her little present, gift-wrapped and everything.

She didn't want to drive alone, but Alice was coming straight from visiting her sister who was ill, and Faye had been shopping, and Vivian had a late-afternoon appointment with that dreadful dentist, so it wasn't convenient for any of them to come by and pick her up. Halfway downtown when she remembered the pottery, Leona turned around immediately and started back.

Stewart had assured her that he was very tired this evening, that he might watch a bit of television or read, and that he intended to go to bed early. Stewart usually said something like that, probably so she wouldn't feel badly going out and leaving him alone on Tuesday nights. Not that she did feel badly about it, but he'd most definitely said he was going to spend a quiet restful evening, and now there was the garage door opening and the car backing out.

Leona reacted hastily, instinctively. Instead of turning into the driveway, she drove straight past, then half a block down the street she stopped and watched through the rear-view mirror.

Of course Stewart was merely going to the drugstore for cigarettes, or something of that sort,

but he had made such a point of how tired he was, and he wasn't terribly addicted to cigarettes. She waited with a strange uneasiness. It was dusk, but she could see Stewart's car back into the street while the automatic door was closing.

She responded without thinking, made a quick U-turn in her own car, and within five seconds was taking Stewart's cream-colored sedan. He would turn off in about four blocks, she told herself, and cross over to Fontaine Avenue. There were several drug stores on Fontaine. As soon as she saw him go into one of them, she'd realize how silly this all was and hurry on downtown to meet the girls.

Well, he turned, but not toward Fontaine Avenue. He turned left instead. Leona followed him, intent now, with increasing certainty that he was going somewhere he ought not to be going. She paid but slight attention to direction and distances, concentrating only on keeping his car in sight, but without letting its driver know he was being followed. She did it expertly. At traffic lights she hung back, letting another car slip in between them. Then when he was away again, she was within half a block, alert to any sudden maneuvers.

Quite suddenly the sedan pulled over to a curb and stopped. She

was ready for him. She slipped quickly into a parking space, slid over to the opposite side of the seat, and peered out.

She saw they were in an area of neat, but not sumptuous, garden apartments. The street was well lighted, so she could see clearly as Stewart hopped out of the car and started toward one of the buildings.

He's dressed up, was her first thought, in his blue suit, his new blue suit. His walk was rapid, rather jaunty. And he had said how tired he was!

Leona was puzzled, angry, brimful of suspicions, but she did not act rashly. She waited till he had gone into the building, waited even longer, hoping against hope that this was a quick stop, that Stewart would be coming right out again, heading back home.

But ten minutes passed, and he did not come out. Leona climbed out of her car then, though still uncertain of what she should do. She walked toward the building, ready to turn and hide should Stewart suddenly emerge. She got all the way to the front entrance, and finally she went inside.

There were four individual apartments, two up and two down, with a little hall and stairway serving all of them. No sound came from anywhere. Leona hesitated.

Should she pound on one door after another, demanding to know if her husband were inside? And what if she found her husband sitting in one of those apartments discussing perhaps . . . buying more life insurance, for instance? Wouldn't she feel silly then! And Stewart would never be done laughing at her.

The fact of the matter was that she simply couldn't find out which apartment he was in, and whom he was visiting. She couldn't loiter here in this hallway till he came out. She couldn't peek in windows—they were too high—and she didn't have a ladder, and the whole notion was too utterly ridiculous.

She ended by jotting down the four names on the mail boxes—Simon, Prentice, Greis, Miller, and the street address of the building: 7733 Princeton Court. Then she turned to her car, drove downtown, parked in the usual garage, and hurried to the Brittany Restaurant. There she repaired first to the powder room, where for a minute or so she consulted the mirror.

In it she saw Leona Coston, aged thirty-nine (honestly), tightly girdled but still rather obviously inclined toward corpulence, neatly, expertly cosmeticked and coiffed, but yet not able to hide the fact that what had never been really beautiful, or perhaps even attrac-

tive, had begun to age somewhat and deteriorate. But then Stewart hadn't married her just for her looks. He'd married her because she . . .

Her thoughts halted suddenly on the precipice. *Why had Stewart married her?* She retreated hastily. She had many good qualities: she dressed in good taste, their home was furnished in good taste, she read all the latest popular novels, she played bridge well, conversed wittily, staged exquisite little parties to which she invited only the most charming people. She drank only sparingly, was never vulgar, loud.

No, she mustn't think this way. There was nothing proven yet, and she mustn't let the girls see she was upset. One must maintain one's pride. The mirror showed her to be pale. She'd have to have a story ready for them. She marched out, head held high, self-possessed, gay, smiling.

The girls were at a table almost in the center of the room, in the midst of things where they liked to be. Paul always gave them a good table. Alice was in a new green dress, Faye in her black, Vivian in that rather gaudy char- treuse. *My dear, dearest friends*, she thought as she approached them, as they saw her coming and waved. *Surely Stewart couldn't pos-*

sibly resent these dear friends of mine. They met, of course, every Tuesday like this, for dinner, and then afterwards a concert, an art show, an opera, a play, a lecture whatever was available. Stewart didn't care to attend affairs like that so actually by going with the girls she was sparing him. Stewart simply didn't care for culture. Should he resent the fact that she was a cultured, sensitive, informed woman?

"Darling, what is the matter?"

The question came from Faye, always alert to parapsychological impulses, always observant, picking up little clues, reading little signs.

"Why, I'm late of course," Leona began.

Faye stared at her with wide blue eyes. As Leona sat down in the empty chair, Faye reached across the table and squeezed her hand sympathetically. "Leona dear," she said, "tell us all about it."

"I'd like a martini," Leona said.

"Of course, dear."

Paul was signaled, and the martini was quickly produced. Leona took off her gloves, and fiddled with her purse, and tried to pretend the others weren't staring at her.

"I had a time starting the car, had to call the service station." She tried the lie for size.



"We're your friends, aren't we?" Vivian coaxed.

"Well, what makes you all so sure there's something wrong?"

"My dear," Alice answered, "it's written all over your face. You're pale."

"Am I?"

"And you have sort of an empty stare," Faye went on, "as if you've just had a dreadful shock."

Leona drank her martini, and finally she told them. They sat in stunned silence, without once interrupting, which was most unusual.

"Of course," she finished, "there could be almost any explanation for it."

"He lied to you," Alice said. "He told you he was tired."

"Perhaps it's something," Leona answered, that Stewart just doesn't want to worry me about."

"Like what?"

"Well, I don't know offhand."

"Husbands shouldn't keep any kind of secrets from their wives," Vivian said, "pleasant or unpleasant."

"We all know," Faye said, "what the explanation really is."

"Absolutely."

"Of course."

Leona nodded.

"It's another woman."

There was a silence of acquiescence all around. Paul brought the

menus. Faye and Alice chose steak, Vivian decided on lobster, and Leona opted for the prime rib.

"But we'll have another round of drinks first," Vivian announced.

Paul discreetly removed the empty glasses.

"Yes, we should have a toast to Alice's birthday," Leona said gallantly.

But Alice was equally magnanimous. "Never mind my birthday. Leona's problem takes precedence."

"How do you feel about it, Leona?" Faye wanted to know.

"Well, I'd like to be sure . . ."

"Well of course one ought to be sure."

"Darling," Alice assured her, "we all have all the sympathy in the world for you. We're all in the same boat, you know. We all have husbands, we're in our late thirties, getting a little seedy."

"Alice dear, is that how an approaching birthday makes you feel?"

"Well, you know how men are."

"Yes, don't we all!"

"Basically polygamous."

"So it's really not Leona's fault at all if Stewart is throwing over the traces."

"Heavens no, I'm not trying to excuse the male sex. I think it's perfectly dreadful. What can a woman do? Cry? Make a scene? Walk out?"

"Walk out? Never! Throw the man out!"

"Then milk him dry!"

Paul brought the steaks, the lobster, and the prime rib. There was perhaps a hint of viciousness in the way the girls attacked the food.

"It makes me mad," Leona said after a while.

"Dear, I don't blame you one bit."

"I should say not. A woman gives the best years of her life to a man, then he feels no . . . no . . ."

"No loyalty."

"They're animals. They really are."

"Do you think so?"

"Absolutely. I watch mine like a hawk."

"What would you do?" Leona said. "I mean, if you knew—if you knew for sure . . ."

"I know what I'd do," Faye answered without hesitation. "I'd kill him."

They went, the next morning about ten, all four of them in one car, to 7733 Princeton Court. The first time they just cruised by.

"That's the place," Leona said.

In daylight it looked less sinister, a rather plain brick-and-frame building, one of a dozen or so set in a small plot of grass and concrete parking areas. No human beings were in sight.

They let Vivian off half a block away. She carried her little black attache case with her. Vivian had once been, for about a week, a representative of Futura Products, and she still had her kit. This morning she would represent Futura briefly again. She would knock on all four doors at 7733 Princeton Court, and see what was behind them.

The car was parked out of sight of the building, and the three women watched Vivian turn the corner and vanish. Settling down to wait, they smoked cigarettes and tried not to talk about what was in all their minds. Leona was nervous and fidgety.

"That husband of mine was sound asleep when I came home," she confided finally, "and he never woke up. But I didn't sleep a wink."

"You poor thing," Alice commented.

"You didn't give yourself away at breakfast, I hope," Faye said.

"No, I didn't. And neither did he."

Vivian was gone about forty-five minutes, but she returned with a triumphant smile. "The Simons," she reported, "are a couple in their sixties. Across the hall are the Millers, two small children, and Mr. Miller was definitely home last night. Upstairs are Mr. and Mrs. Greis. If you'd take one look at

her, you'd know that Stewart would be safe there."

"Prentice?" Leona asked eagerly.

"Mrs. Prentice. She lives alone. Probably a divorcee."

"Well go on, Vivian!"

"She's blonde. Not over thirty. A good figure."

Leona turned pale and ground out her cigarette fiercely. "That's the one then. Prentice."

Vivian nodded. "If it's what we think it is."

But the girls wanted to make sure. They waited till the following Tuesday.

It was a week of dreadful suspense for Leona. Stewart acted throughout with distressing normalcy. Sometimes in the evenings he read, the same cheap magazines that he always read, or he watched television, the same dull programs. On Saturday he dutifully cut the grass. On Sunday he even accompanied Leona to a flower show. He gave no trouble at all, but that was Stewart. He had never given any trouble.

All week Leona was vigilant, but could detect no signs of betrayal. On Tuesday evening, when he came home from work, she was especially watchful. If an assignation were indeed in prospect, would he be excited in anticipation?

"Where to tonight, dear?" he asked when he arrived, and kissed

her dispassionately on the cheek.

"Who?" She couldn't resist the temptation to pretend to be dense.

"Why you, of course. This is Tuesday, your night out, isn't it?"

His face, a little jowly now at forty, was absolutely placid. His eyes, soft and brown behind his glasses, were only politely inquiring. He needed a haircut, the gray was showing. Or was he letting it grow longer, to look more romantic?

"You are going out tonight, aren't you?"

"I don't know."

"What's the matter?" Was he alarmed?

"Sometimes I feel I shouldn't go out so often and leave you alone."

"Nonsense. Going out is good for you."

"Perhaps we should have people in oftener."

"Well, that's all well and good, but you also need your nights out with the girls." He went toward the bedroom to change his clothes.

It all fitted, everything he said fitted the pattern. She would have liked to torture him by staying home, but she had previous, better plans. She put on her hat, picked up her purse and gloves, and called out to him sweetly, "I'm going to the Bach concert tonight, dear. Bye-bye."

"Have a good time," he called

back. "Bye, and drive carefully."

Leona drove her car to the pre-arranged corner where Alice's car, with Alice at the wheel and Faye and Vivian in the rear, was waiting. She parked her own car, locked it, and climbed in with the girls. She recounted the conversation she'd just had with Stewart.

"There's no doubt," Vivian said, "he intends to go out tonight."

They drove by a circuitous route to a spot half a block down the street from Leona's house, and parked facing the direction Stewart would take if he were heading toward 7733 Princeton Court. There they waited, and watched.

About forty minutes after Leona's departure from the premises, the Costons' automatic garage door opened and the cream-colored sedan backed out. Then it drove off predictably.

"Let's go," Leona said. "You won't have to stay too close to him. I know this time where he's going."

They went, silent and seething, Valkyries in angry pursuit of the victim marked by the gods. The sedan was easy to follow. When they arrived at Princeton Court, they parked at a safe distance and gave Stewart plenty of time to get into the building.

Vivian got ready with her Futura kit. "What if he should come

out suddenly and see me in the hall?" she asked.

"He won't," Leona assured her. "But if he should, he'll be the one to be embarrassed. You'll still be a Futura representative."

"But I'm supposed to be with you on Tuesday evenings. Stewart knows that."

"Tonight you had a few late calls to make."

"All right," Vivian hopped out.

The others waited. The plan was simple. Knock on the Simon, Greis and Miller doors. Tell them this is a "call-back". You may get thrown out for being so persistent a saleswoman, but get in first, and make sure if Stewart is in any of those apartments. If he isn't, then he's with Mrs. Prentice.

It took Vivian only fifteen minutes. She returned almost running. "I got inside all my three apartments," she reported quickly. "He wasn't in any of those."

"All right," Leona said with remarkable calm. "Let's go to dinner."

At the Brittany they had two leisurely rounds of cocktails, and then dined sumptuously. Each had her own thoughts, but they were a long time getting around to a direct discussion.

"Well, now you have the facts, Leona," Faye said at last. "Every Tuesday, when he knows you're

safely out of the way for the whole evening, Stewart goes to visit Mrs. Prentice."

"We've been getting together on Tuesdays for a long time," Alice said. "He may have known Mrs. Prentice for just as long. It's very cozy for him, isn't it?"

"Very cozy," Leona agreed bitterly.

"Of course the obvious thing," Alice offered, "is to break up our Tuesday Club."

"Why should we?" Leona demanded.

"For your sake, dear."

"Stewart would find some other time."

"But he can't, don't you see? He can't sneak away from the office during the day. If he goes on an errand over the weekend, he has to account for his time. But by taking a free night, you've given him a free night."

"Well, we hardly use our free nights in the same way."

"What does a woman do?" Faye wondered. "What can she do? Throw the husband out? Get a divorce?"

Leona shook her head. "Then he'd have every evening to spend with that hussy."

Faye nodded. "Even with alimony, the wife always gets the worst of the deal, because the new wife always manages to control the

husband. I've seen it happen too often."

"Then what's the answer?" Alice asked.

"One could always confront him with the facts," Vivian suggested. "He might come crawling back."

Leona sipped her after-dinner creme-de-menthe. "I'd like to see him crawl," she said, "but I'm not sure that I want him back."

"What do you want, dear?"

"What good is it to possess a man who really doesn't want you? Who has deceived and lied to you for weeks . . . months . . . possibly years. Who has been disloyal, untrue. I don't want a man like that. I want only . . ." Leona tossed off the rest of the creme-de-menthe. There was a slight tinge of green on her lips.

"What do you want, Leona?"

"I don't know exactly. To get even, I suppose."

"A lover?"

"Hardly that. I'm not very fond of men at the moment."

"What then?"

Leona leaned forward over the table, and the others leaned in toward her. "When a woman has been treated as I have been treated," she told them, "she has a right to get even in any way she pleases."

They nodded in agreement. "Whatever you decide to do, Leona," Alice said, "we'll all back

you up. You can depend on that."

"More than that," Faye corrected, "we'll help you."

"All the way," said Vivian.

Tuesday, a fortnight later, was the night they set. The plan was the essence of simplicity, depending only upon the single-mindedness of four people. These four ladies were indeed single-minded about their project.

It began as Tuesdays had been in the habit of beginning. Stewart Coston arrived home just at six. Leona, her hat on, was primping before the hall mirror.

"My, don't we look pretty tonight," Stewart said, and kissed her lightly on the cheek.

"Thank you," she answered.

"Where are we off to tonight?"

"*La Traviata*."

"One of your favorites, isn't it?"

"Oh yes."

"Well, I probably won't be awake for your inevitable reactions when you get home. I'm rather tired, and you're usually pretty late on opera nights."

She smiled understandingly. "Poor dear, you're tired so often lately. No, don't bother to wait up for me."

He went to the bedroom. She watched his receding back. He didn't appear a bit tired; rather the opposite. She was quite positive where he'd be tonight.

A horn sounded from the street. "Bye now, dear," she shouted toward the bedroom. "Alice is picking me up."

"Bye," he answered faintly.

Outside all three girls were waiting for her. As she climbed in, Faye asked, "Is he going out tonight?"

"He could hardly wait for me to leave to start sprucing up," she answered.

They drove to their usual rendezvous, the Brittany, ate and drank heartily. Paul was to notice that all the ladies, especially Leona, were in good spirits this evening, and nothing was amiss. Bubbly and bright, they left the Brittany for the Majestic Theatre.

There they made it a point to chat with the manager, Mr. Tomaso, whom they knew by sight and name. Mr. Tomaso would now remember, it was hoped, that all four ladies were present this evening. They made a special effort also to chat with the young usher, but he was a stranger and unreliable.

When they settled in their seats, they looked around carefully. Nobody was in sight whom they recognized. That was good because, otherwise, someone might notice and remember that during the latter part of the show one of the quartet had been missing.

"I'll leave at intermission," Leona told them as they consulted in whispers. "And remember, don't go searching for acquaintances then, and don't stay in one group, because then somebody could recall that there were only three of us, not four."

"Are you sure," Vivian asked, "that intermission time will be soon enough to catch him?"

"My guess is," Leona answered, "that he stays as long as he can. He checked with me tonight on this being a late night. Besides, if I miss him tonight, there's always next week."

The first act went by splendidly. As the house lights came up, they hit the aisles with the rest of the crowd, making sure to disperse immediately. Leona didn't hesitate. She headed straight for the exit.

She kept a sharp look-out, and was certain that nobody whom she knew saw her leave. Outside, of course, she had to walk alone to Alice's car. Being alone in the downtown area at night was a bit risky, but the stakes were well worth it.

They'd parked in the street, a bit away from the theatre, because in a lot a parking attendant might remember that a woman had come all by herself to pick up a car before the show was over.

Leona made it to the car without mishap. She had familiarized herself with it during the previous week, so she had no trouble handling it. She felt exhilarated once she was under way. She had no qualms, only a feeling of serene justification, and drove to Princeton Court without a quiver of doubt.

There was the sedan, parked not too far away from the entrance of 7733. How brazen Stewart was! But she didn't waste time thinking about that. She parked her own car—Alice's rather—out of sight, then walked boldly back toward the sedan.

No one was in sight. Actually, Princeton Court was a rather quiet neighborhood. Leona looked up toward the Prentice apartment. One window showed a light, but since she didn't know the pattern of rooms, she couldn't deduce much from that fact. It didn't trouble her, however. Vengeance was in the offing.

She unlocked Stewart's car with the spare keys. Wearing gloves, she left no fresh fingerprints. She wriggled inside, locked the door again, then wedged herself down on the floor of the back seat.

The wait could be long, so she did her best to make herself comfortable, then checked her equipment. There was really only one

item, a piece of heavy iron pipe about eighteen inches long. It had been in the basement for years, behind the furnace, forgotten, dusty. She was quite certain there was no way for the police to check where an old piece of pipe had come from.

She was ready. She might have been nervous, but she wasn't. A steady supply of indignation, anger and resentment fueled her determination. Her mind wandered to Stewart and Mrs. Prentice occasionally, but she was long past the stage of mere jealousy. She only speculated upon what state Stewart would be in when he returned to the car. A state of euphoria, unsuspecting, his senses dulled, his reactions slow? She hoped so. It would make her task easier. But easy or difficult, she would do it.

Time passed, but she wasn't worried. It was Stewart who had to keep track of the time. Then she heard him, or someone. Footsteps on the sidewalk, Stewart himself! A key was fumbling in the door lock.

It was very dark. She knew he couldn't see her. Even with the dome light on, the back seat floor was in deep shadow. Besides, he wasn't expecting anyone to be there. He was humming a little tune, unrecognizable because he was doing such a bad job of it. In

fact, Leona was quite certain from the sound of him that he'd been drinking.

He got the door open. The dome light came on. The humming was punctuated by small grunts as Stewart squeezed himself into the car and slid along the leather seat. The door closed. The light went off again. Now there was more fumbling. He seemed to be trying to reach his car keys, immersed in some inaccessible pocket.

Leona had no trouble raising herself quietly off the floor. She had rehearsed the precise movements in the rear of her own car. Up on the left elbow . . . get one's knees under one's body . . . lift the weight slowly . . . peek over



the top of the front seat . . . line up the target . . . just a little higher, but not nearly high enough to be spied in the rear-view mirror . . . fine . . . he doesn't see or

hear anything . . . oblivious . . . bring up the pipe . . . cock the right arm far back . . . and remember, when you swing, don't be chicken, give it everything you've got.

Leona gave it everything she had.

Afterwards she searched inside Stewart's jacket for his wallet. She also removed the small diamond ring her husband sported. The crime was to look like a robbery, of course.

There was the tiny chance that Mrs. Prentice would be watching from a window to see the sedan leave. Leona climbed into the front seat, got the car started, and drove away, but she went only a block or so, out of sight of 7733 Princeton Court. She found another parking space, left the car there with its grisly contents, and walked back to Alice's car.

A very few minutes later she picked the girls up in front of the Majestic Theatre.

"Now let's remember," Leona told them when they were all gathered in the Coston livingroom. "You brought me home, then I invited all of you in for coffee, we came in, I went into the bedroom to see if Stewart were asleep. But he wasn't there, and the car wasn't in the garage."

They all nodded in understand-

ing, silently approving the plan.

"He left no note," Leona went on, "and he'd never done a thing like this before; so naturally I was worried and so I wanted to contact the police immediately."

They nodded again.

Leona picked up the telephone, and dialed the number they had already looked up. "Police," she said in a distraught voice, "my husband is gone . . ."

Lieutenant Joe Godney had seen enough corpses in his day. He looked at the one in the cream-colored sedan, and came to several rather quick conclusions.

Robbery seemed to have been the motive. A ring had apparently been forcibly pulled off a finger—there was a bruised knuckle, and a welt where the ring had been worn—and the man's wallet was missing. The weapon was in plain sight, a short piece of iron pipe. From the looks of things the murder had been committed inside the car, with the murderer either in the back seat or in the front seat beside the victim, rather than the body's having been dragged from somewhere else and put into the car.

Matching this corpse with reports of missing persons was a simple enough procedure. The widow routinely identified the body as that of her husband, Stewart Cos-

ton, and to Joe Godney fell the job of questioning her.

She'd been out with her girlfriends on Tuesday evening, a rather regular habit of hers on Tuesdays. She had presumed her husband intended to remain at home. Why or where he went she had no idea. Had her husband had any enemies? No, not to her knowledge. What was he doing in Princeton Court? Again, Mrs. Coston wasn't helpful. She herself knew nobody in Princeton Court.

Joe Godney came away from the interview with a strange uneasiness. Mrs. Coston was outwardly a typically bereaved widow. There'd been tears in her eyes all the time he'd been talking to her, yet he had the feeling that beneath the emotion there was something else, a placidity, almost a satisfaction.

The lieutenant stayed with the case. The Police Department didn't like homicides, tried its best to prevent them, and if that failed, to solve them. Joe Godney was a devoted cop.

Now the murder of Stewart Coston had all the appearances of a routine strong-arm robbery which had ended in the ultimate violence. Mrs. Coston had described the lost ring, so of course the word went out to pawn shops, informers, and similar institutions and individuals, to watch out for that ring. Mean-

while, however, Godney pursued his own little inclinations.

Mrs. Coston had said she'd been surprised to find her husband gone from the house. Why had he gone? Where? To see whom?

First of all, the corpse had been rather well dressed. It was unlikely that a man would get togged out like that of an evening to go to the drugstore or to mail a letter. He'd been visiting someone then. For business? Or pleasure?

The murder could have been committed somewhere else, and the car driven to Princeton Court, or Stewart Coston could have been killed right where he and his car were found. In the second instance, he could have been visiting someone in the neighborhood, or for that matter, the same someone could have murdered him. It was worth investigating.

Godney preferred to do this kind of leg work himself. It was a matter of visiting all the residences in the area, showing his identification, and asking the right questions. It all went quickly, methodically, but not too promisingly. Nobody seemed to have known Stewart Coston. But all the time the lieutenant was asking questions of the residents, there was the question in his own mind. Where does a man go, all dressed up, on his wife's night out?

7733 Princeton Court was one of the last places the lieutenant tried. It was over a block away from the spot where Stewart Coston's car had been found, but if Coston had been rather cautious, he might have parked at some distance and walked to his final destination.

On the second floor of 7733 Godney found Maxine Prentice. She wore tight slacks and a gaudy blouse, she was very blonde, and she exuded the kind of sensuality that made Godney think to himself, *If Coston had been visiting a woman in this neighborhood, this was a candidate to be that woman.*

"Lieutenant Godney," he announced, showing his card. "Homicide Squad."

He was watching her green-blue eyes, and he saw a flicker there—of fear? No, of a sudden realization of a need to be wary.

"Come in," she said casually.

Ordinarily he didn't accept such invitations, but this time he did. It gave him a glimpse of the interior of the apartment. Gaudy, like her blouse, wild colors everywhere, strange art objects, unusual furniture. She offered him a chair, and he sat in it gingerly.

"There was a man named Stewart Coston found murdered a block from here," he began.

"Yes, I know." She perched on a

bench opposite him. "Is that—"

"This happened Tuesday night," he went on. "Did you or your husband see or hear anything?"

"I don't have a husband." That was good, careful of her, in case he already knew or would check.

"Then did you see or hear anything?"

"No."

He took a stab, asked a question he had no right to ask. "Mrs. Prentice, what were you doing Tuesday evening?"

Again there was something in her eyes, the passage of a shadow. It was as if the woman were asking herself questions. Here's a cop, he's investigating Stewart Coston. How much does he know? Does he know about me? Then the shadow passed, and she smiled, a hard, wise little smile.

"What is this, Lieutenant?" she asked him. "Am I being officially questioned in connection with this murder case? Should I hire myself a lawyer?"

He shook his head and got up. "Sorry. I thought maybe you could help us."

She got up too, and stood close to him. "I wish I could help you, Lieutenant. I don't like the idea of murders happening around my neighborhood."

He said goodbye and left then, and he wasn't sure of a thing. He'd

have to have a lot more than he had now before he could pull Mrs. Prentice in for questioning. All he had was a vague, vague hunch, a wild, wild guess, and that wasn't enough.

He went back to see Leona Coston again. He made his apologies for bothering her in her time of grief, and she assured him she understood it was necessary.

"I feel, Mrs. Coston," he said, "that what we need to find out is why your husband left the house Tuesday night. He was well dressed, indicating he had an appointment. Did your husband ever have evening business appointments?"

"Not in his line of work, Lieutenant."

He considered her. She wasn't what he thought of as an attractive woman. She was vain, selfish, somehow suggesting whatever was deadly in the female of the species.

"Mrs. Coston, I hate to mention this at this time, but perhaps it has crossed your mind too. Would it have been possible that your husband had gone out to meet a woman?"

She looked back at him squarely, and it seemed to him that her mask of sorrow and mourning slipped just a little askew. "I hardly think so," she answered, "but I realize anything is possible. I don't be-

lieve Stewart was untrue to me. I always knew him as a faithful husband, and I shall continue to think of him as that in death—unless you find something to prove otherwise, Lieutenant."

He left, knowing there was nothing to be gained from further questions. His hunch was still intact, stronger than ever. Supposing, just supposing, that Stewart Coston had been seeing Maxine Prentice on the Tuesday evenings that his wife went out, and supposing that Leona Coston had found out about it? What would a woman like her have done, a woman who now acted so piously sure of her husband's fidelity?

He went to see Alice Harter. Alice, very distraught, took great pains to recount to him the glorious evening the girls had had together, dinner, then *La Traviata*, and then—then the tragic ending of the evening. The lieutenant had a question to ask, "Was Leona Coston with you all evening?" Of course he asked it only indirectly, but the answer was clear enough. Yes, indeed she was.

The lieutenant visited Vivian Roth too. Vivian's story was identical with Alice's—dinner at the Brittany, the opera at the Majestic, while somebody was murdering Stewart Coston.

The lieutenant didn't neglect

Faye Ledford. Faye corroborated the story told by the others. But with Faye, Joe Godney tried a little harder. "What about Stewart Coston?" he asked.

"What do you mean, Lieutenant?"

"Off the record now. I won't mention this to Mrs. Coston. What do you suppose her husband was up to, going out last Tuesday night?"

"I have no idea."

"Did you know him?"

"Not very well."

"He was dressed up. He had an appointment of some kind. Could it have been with a woman?"

Faye Ledford considered for a moment. "I don't really know," she said at last, "but if that were the case, then I'd say he deserved to be murdered. Don't you agree, Lieutenant?"

Godney departed without committing himself on that point. He went to the Brittany Restaurant and talked to a waiter named Paul, an obsequious fellow whose body seemed bent in a perpetual, slavish bow. Oh yes, the four ladies dined at the Brittany last Tuesday evening, as they did almost every Tuesday evening. *All four.* Always four.

At the Majestic Theatre, Godney encountered the manager. Did he by any chance remember last Tues-

day, four ladies? Oh, but yes. Mr. Tomaso was very certain and clear. The four ladies were good customers. They attended everything. They were so cultured, so refined.

"Mrs. Coston was definitely here last Tuesday?"

"But certainly. I greeted them personally in the lobby."

"Before the performance?"

"Of course."

"How did they like it?"

"What do you mean?"

"Did you check with them afterwards to see if they liked it?"

"I don't remember that. I don't think so . . ."

"Then you're not sure whether all four stayed through the show? Whether Mrs. Coston stayed, for instance?"

"Mrs. Coston walk out on *La Traviata*? She is an opera lover, a lady of great culture and refinement."

The lieutenant left Mr. Tomaso remonstrating in his lobby and went home.

But he didn't give up on the case. He continued, at least, to theorize. There were no useful fingerprints on the sedan, not even smudges. Not many strong-arm robbers wear gloves, but this one apparently had—which fact argued for premeditation. The manner in which the fatal blows had been de-

livered indicated that the murderer had struck from behind, and even a bit below, as if he had perhaps waited in ambush, crouched low in the back seat of the car. How did the murderer get into the car? Only the driver's door had been found unlocked, the other door locked. Probably Coston had left his car locked, and the murderer knew how to unlock car doors—or had had a set of keys. But if the murderer had waited in ambush, how had he known that the driver of the sedan would return during the evening, rather than the next morning? Interesting theories . . .

He kept some track of the ladies involved. Maxine Prentice seemed to stay home alone on Tuesday nights, then finally took up with a chap named Claude Wesley. The girls of the Tuesday Club, after a decent interim of mourning lasting one week, resumed their regular nights out. Leona Coston collected a hundred thousand dollars in life insurance, and continued to enjoy the same standard of living as when her husband was alive.

Stewart Coston's wallet and dia-

mond ring never showed up anywhere. The case was put in the "Unsolved" file.

This bothered Joe Godney, and frightened him a little too. Not that he was in sympathy with the male point of view that men are entitled to certain illicit pleasures, but neither could he approve of extreme retaliatory measures on the part of the female population. If all the philanderers of the world were to meet a fate similar to Stewart Coston's, well it could get pretty tough for detectives in Homicide.

The girls were dining at the Brittany, and then were going to attend a production of *Tosca* at the Majestic. Faye was half an hour late, and when she finally arrived she looked pale and upset.

Leona was sensitive to the small parapsychological signals. "Faye dear, what is it?"

"Order me a double martini," Faye said, and looked around at the little circle for a long minute. "I think Bruce is out with another woman tonight."



*As Milton would say, and, in fact, did:
Revenge, at first though sweet,
Bitter ere long back on itself recoils.*

ASHES OF REVENGE



I've never considered myself a bad guy, really. Usually cheerful and friendly, I get along well with folks, and I'd give you the gold out of my teeth if you needed it. But I get awfully mad if people try to push me around.

I like to read crime stories, but they get my dander up sometimes. Like when the cops get some poor boob in the back room at the police station and beat him up, even though he may be innocent. When I read about that I suffer with the poor jerk, and then I get hopping mad, and I think if they did that to me I'd get even if it was the last thing I ever did.

They claim that cops don't do that anymore. Look how nice the police are on some of those TV shows! But there are some sadistic fatheads in backward places who will still give you the full treatment if they feel like it, and I've got the marks to prove it.

The day after it happened I woke up at eight o'clock. The sun was

by Hal Lewis

shining through the bedroom windows, and somewhere in the distance I could hear a crow cawing. Ruthie lives in a bungalow near the city limits, and I had been living with her for about three months.

She was still asleep. I sat up and looked at her on the other side of the bed. The night had been hot for October, and we had kicked the covers half off. With her back to me, she was curled up like a little child, and her black hair was fanned out over the pillow. The graceful line of her back flowed down from her shoulder to her slender waist, then mounted her sloping hips and disappeared under the rumpled sheet. I was tempted to reach out and spank her playfully.

When I got out of bed, the sharp pain in my belly suddenly brought me back to what had happened the day before. As I cursed the cops eloquently, Ruthie turned over and looked up at me.

"What's the matter, Dick?" she asked.

"Nothing much," I mumbled.

I shuffled across the blue shag rug, surprised that I could still walk. Moving around the blue and white room, I gathered up my clothes.

"Aren't you going to work today?" she asked, yawning. "It's getting late."

At the door of the bathroom I turned and said, "I don't feel like working. I feel like killing those cops that beat me up. That's how I feel!"

"Don't talk like that!" she said, her eyes dark with concern. "That'll do no good. You'd only get into more trouble."

I went into the bathroom without answering her. If I lay in the hot water for a while, it might ease some of my sore spots.

Ruthie owns and operates "Ruth's Place", a beanery on Michigan Avenue in South Forks. I had gone in there for lunch, and she had come to wait on me. She was wearing a blue uniform which clung to her lush form as if it had been painted on in flowing strokes. On one pocket was the name Ruth. Before the meal was over I had a date with her, and that was the beginning of a happy arrangement, for within two weeks I moved right in with her.

As I came out of the bath I was greeted by the aroma of good coffee and scrambled eggs. We ate in silence, but when we had finished she looked at me with her soft brown eyes and asked, "If you don't go to work, what are you going to do?"

"Kill somebody, maybe!" Then, when I saw how it hurt her, I tried to make light of it. "Kill time, I

suppose, but that's been killin' me."

She shivered and pulled the red robe close about her. "Dick, please don't do anything rash. Give yourself a chance to forget about it."

I got up from the table. "Some things are hard to forget."

She came around the table and put her hands on my shoulders. "Stay here with me today, please. It's my day off, and I want you here, out of trouble."

"No," I said, pushing her aside. "Nobody can do what they did to me and get away with it." Seething with anger, I left the house.

I might have forgotten my fury if I hadn't started drinking again. Of course I would have been mad for a few days, but my common sense would have kept me from going too far. However, I have a tendency to brood. I couldn't go to work, so I spent the day drinking and mulling over the injustice of it all until I built up a full head of steam. I was ready to blow up, and there's no help for anyone who gets in my way when I'm like that. I don't know where I got the gun. The last few hours of that day are lost in a mental fog.

From where I was squatting in the shrubbery by the garage I could see the headlights cutting a path through the darkness. It was Detective John D. Malone, just getting

home from headquarters. He'd been staying out later than usual while his wife and kids were away.

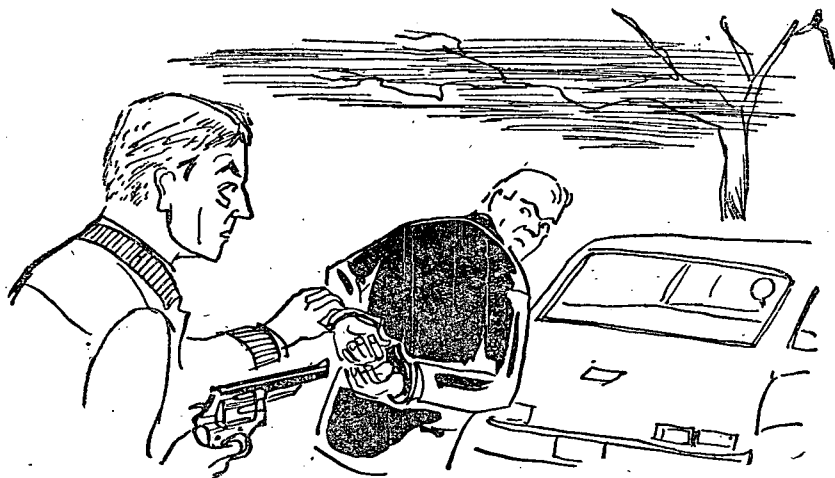
I was cold and stiff from remaining in one position, but this was the moment I'd been waiting for, and I forgot my discomfort. The deadly fury surged up in my insides, my mouth tasted bitter as gall, my pulse was pounding in my ears. I was going to make this cop suffer for what he had done to me!

He came down the driveway past his ranch-style house and braked his station wagon to a stop in the garage. He turned off the ignition and lights. I could hear the snapping sound of the motor as it began to cool off, I could see the glowing end of his cigar and smell the tobacco. As he turned to pull down the door I made my move. In two quick steps I was at his back.

"Don't move and don't holler!" I said. "Put your hands on top of the car. This gun is loaded!"

He did as I ordered. Cautiously I reached into his pockets for the handcuffs, probably the same ones he had snapped on me hours before.

"Now put your right hand back here real easy." He did so. I was watching for him to turn and make a quick grab for the gun, but he didn't try it. Taken by surprise when I shoved the thirty-eight in his back, he would wait till later to



make his move. I slipped the bracelet on his right hand. Then I made him give me his left, and slipped the cold steel on it.

It's all pretty hazy to me now, but I think all I had in mind was to give him a few belts like he gave me in the station house. But, just then, a car went by, and I decided I'd better take him somewhere more secluded before I worked him over.

Still holding the gun on him, I opened the back of the station wagon. "Get in," I ordered. When he held back I jabbed him viciously with the rod, and he scrambled in, falling on his face. Then he rolled over and looked at me in the faint light.

"Dick—Dick Leacock!" he exclaimed. "What do you mean by this?"

"You'll find out," I said. I grabbed a piece of rope that was hanging on the wall. Suddenly, as I leaned over to tie his ankles, he kicked out with both feet. He had intended to kick me in the jaw, and he would have knocked me cold if he had connected. But I'd been watching for something like that, and dodged. Soon I had his feet tightly bound.

"Where are you taking me?" he demanded.

"You'll find out soon enough." I shoved a gag in his mouth, then got his car keys from his pocket. In spite of the frosty autumn air, I was sweating like a blacksmith.

It was a half-hour drive to the place I decided on. I drove out on Route 20 about eight miles, then turned onto a dirt road that wound through a heavily wooded tract.

Eventually I reached an abandoned cottage on the shore of a lake where I fished sometimes.

I parked close to the cottage, got out, and opened the back of the wagon. Then I wondered how I was going to get him inside. He weighed at least two hundred, while I stand five feet six and am kind of frail. Guess that's why folks are always shoving me around.

Finally I untied his feet and let him furnish his own transportation. The bone-dry leaves, covering the ground and heaped against the cottage, crackled as he walked ahead of me, weaving and stumbling as the blood began to circulate in his legs again. I held my thirty-eight in my right hand, the electric lantern from his car in my left.

"Stand right there," I ordered as we entered. The cottage was bare of furniture except for a rickety table and a big oil burner. I put the lantern on the table. Then I took the rope with which I had bound his legs and tied one end of it to the handcuffs behind his back. Suddenly he seemed to realize what I was about to do. Desperately he turned and tried to kick me in the groin. Even with his hands cuffed behind him, he was dangerous. We danced about the room, with me hanging on to the rope for dear life. Finally I managed to hit him

behind the ear with the butt of the gun. While he was half stunned, I got him over to the wall and passed the rope over a hook above his head.

Drawing the rope as tightly as I could, I soon had him standing on his toes. Now his entire weight was suspended on his arms, which were doubled up painfully between his shoulder blades. Maybe you think I'm sadistic, but that's what he and his stooges did to me in that little back room at headquarters.

At this point, I removed the gag from his mouth. He cleared his throat several times before he could speak. Then he asked belligerently, "What the hell do you expect to gain by this?"

"This is what you did to me down at the station. Tried to beat me into admitting something I didn't do. How do you like it?"

He didn't like it at all. Beads of sweat were forming on his forehead and trickling down his red face. As his face got redder, the scar tissue over his right eye stood out like some dead thing.

"You were a logical suspect," he fumed. "When that service station attendant was killed, you were seen near there."

It wasn't easy for him to get the words out. Hanging on the hook is no treat. I knew just how his

straining muscles were beginning to torture him, but he gritted his teeth and held back the groans. I had to give him credit for being tough. I hit him a few times in the middle, then I started on his face.

"Just because I got in trouble once when I was a kid, you half kill me. Thought I'd spill, didn't you? You and Kildare and Wilson."

"But we let you go when the real killer was picked up. We apologized, offered you a ride home."

I swore, but I suddenly felt sick. Have you ever hit a man when he couldn't hit back? I hope not, but if you have, you'll know just how I felt at that moment. I lit a cigarette and tried to be nonchalant about it. I even blew smoke in his face. Then I stood there, looking at the welts on my knuckles.

I'd had my last drink while I was waiting for him by his garage. I'd finished the bottle and tossed it away. Now, because of my struggle with him, I was cold sober. All the hate and venom had washed out of me with the liquor, and I was only a hollow shell of frustration and self-disgust.

He must have known I was weakening. "Let me go now, and it will only be assault. You'll get off with a light jail sentence. Kill me, and it's the death house in this state."

He didn't mention the penalty for kidnapping, but I knew he hadn't forgotten it. I was beginning to realize I had a tiger by the tail and didn't know how to let go.

"Let me go now, and I'll promise not to press charges," he urged. "Think it over, kid. I'm giving you a break." He raised up on his toes to get some of the weight off his throbbing arms. "Please, let me off this hook, or I'll die."

I knew just how much I could trust his promise to go easy on me, but I had to do something. I went over and untied the rope that was holding him up. With a groan he collapsed on the floor. I dragged him over to the big oil heater and tied him to the supply pipe. Then I tied his feet together again. That would hold him till I got a head start.

"Good night, and sleep tight!" I jeered as I went out the door. I took the last cigarette from my pack and lit it with the butt of the one I had just finished. As I hurried toward the car, I tossed the butt away. I was back in South Forks by eleven-thirty.

Ruthie was still up when I got to the bungalow. "Where have you been all day?" she asked.

"Tell you later. I got to get away from here. In a hurry!"

"You didn't—what you said—kill anyone?"

"No, but I'm in a jam. Can you lend me some cash?"

"Of course, but why do you have to leave town?"

"I kidnapped a cop." I went into the bedroom and threw some clothes in a bag, then told her what had happened.

"But you can't leave him out there," she protested. "He might die."

"I've thought of that," I said. "Give me a couple hours' start, then call the police. Tell them where Malone is. Go out somewhere to phone, and don't give your name."

She agreed to do as I said. Then she handed me some bills. "Here's thirty dollars, all I have in the house. But I wish it didn't have to end like this."

She was holding me tight and crying. I didn't have time for that. I kissed her, and got out of there.

What a sense of relief I felt! I'd never harmed anyone before, and I was glad I hadn't really hurt Malone. It's no good to seek revenge, if you fry for it.

I drove to Gary first, and abandoned Malone's car, which I had used for a getaway. That would make them think I was headed for Chicago. Then I "borrowed" another car and headed for Tennessee. I had friends in the hills who would hide me till the heat was off.

I stopped several times for coffee,

and it was seven a.m. when I saw the blonde beside the road, thumbing a ride. At first I was going to drive right on. Then I realized they'd have an A.P.B. out for me by this time, but they would be looking for a man alone, and might not notice a couple. I stopped for her. "Want a ride?"

"Yes. I want to go to Indianapolis."

She wore a blue dress that was pretty snug, and there was about one hundred and ten pounds of explosive sex for it to cling to. As I watched her get into the car, I almost forgot how tired I was.

"I'm going there, but I'm just about pooped. Been driving all night."

"Maybe you should stop somewhere and rest."

"I thought perhaps you could drive for a while."

"Sorry. I never learned."

Nearing Indianapolis, I realized I was too tired to drive any farther. If I could hide in a motel for a few hours, I'd feel better able to go on. Presently I saw one back from the highway where I could park the car out of sight, and the vacancy sign was up.

"Guess I'll take your advice and rest a while," I told the blonde. "Are you willing?"

She smiled knowingly. "Why not?"

"Register as man and wife?"

"All right with me," she replied.

"But if we do, I had better introduce myself. My name is Myra Candless."

"You can call me Dick—Dick Long, Mrs. Long."

Inside the motel room, I took off everything but my shorts and climbed into bed. A few hours later, we were awakened by a knock on the door.

"Open up!" a gruff voice commanded. "This is the law."

I thought of my thirty-eight, but I had thrown it away, not wanting to be caught with it in the car. Pulling on my pants, I went to the door. There were two cops in uniform, one tall and good-looking, the other short and fat. To my surprise, they ignored me and went to the bed.

"Come on, Peggy," the tall one said. "You're going back to Detroit."

The fat cop addressed me. "You made a mistake when you picked her up. She escaped from the Detroit House of Correction. Someone saw you pick her up, and we traced the car here."

"I didn't know she was hot," I said. "You know how it is. A fellow sees something pretty nice . . . then he gets a room. But I didn't know the law wanted her."

Suddenly modest, Peggy wrapped

a sheet around herself and went to the bathroom to dress. The only words she had uttered since the cops came in were, "Damn fuzz!"

Shorty was regarding me suspiciously. "Got your certificate of registration for that car out there?"

"No. I borrowed it from a friend."

"Let's see your driver's license."

With a sinking feeling, I handed it over.

He looked at my name, then did a double-take. "Dick Leacock!" He turned to his partner. "Isn't that the guy who's wanted in South Forks?"

"Yes, he's the bird." They both glared at me. "Didn't get far, did you?"

They took us to the nearest police station, where they started Peggy on her journey back to Detroit. In a few hours, Kildare and Wilson came to take me back to South Forks. Malone wasn't with them. He probably didn't feel like traveling.

"What are you arresting me for?" I asked as they shoved me into their car.

"You'll find out soon enough!" snapped Kildare. He glared at me, disgust in his cold, blue eyes. Wilson's big frame quivered with rage.

Realizing it was useless to ask questions, I remained silent throughout the rest of the trip. Of

course, Malone had escaped and set the bloodhounds on me. Had Ruthie double-crossed me and turned in the alarm at once?

To my surprise, when we got to South Forks, we didn't go to the police station. Instead, they took me out to the cottage by the lake. I began to feel like I was taking that last walk to the death house. My heart felt like an iceberg, and I could hardly breathe. They jerked me out of the car, and dragged me toward the cottage.

"Where's Malone?" I blurted.

"That's just what we wanted you to ask!" Wilson snarled.

"You kidnapped him and brought him out here," Kildare said. He dropped me with a right to the jaw. "In all my experience, I never heard of such a crime."

I looked up at him from the ground. "It wasn't intentional," I protested.

Then I fell silent. I'd been careless where I tossed my cigarette butt. It had landed in the leaves drifted against the shack. The old cottage was burned to the ground!

"Ready to make a statement?"

Wilson snapped. "Well, are you?"

"Yes," I said. "Yes, yes, yes! Only, please, take me away from here!"

Back at headquarters in a room bleakly furnished with a table and three chairs, I dictated my story to Kildare. When I was finished, something made me turn and look toward the door. There stood Malone, and Ruthie was with him.

"Did you get it all?" he asked Kildare.

"But—but I thought you—"

"I know—you thought I was dead," Malone said. "And I would have been, if it hadn't been for your girlfriend."

"I'm sorry, Dick," Ruthie explained, "but I had a feeling that something terrible might happen. I knew it would be hard to tell the police how to get there—so many turns—so I went out myself."

"Got there none too soon! Another ten minutes—" Malone shrugged.

As they led me back toward a cell, Ruthie said she'd wait for me, but I hope she doesn't. It'll be an awful long wait.



Prosaically speaking, herein is presented further proof that persistence in saving eventually rewards one with a booming dividend.



As Joey walked by, the woman poked her head from a parked car and said, "Hey, Marco."

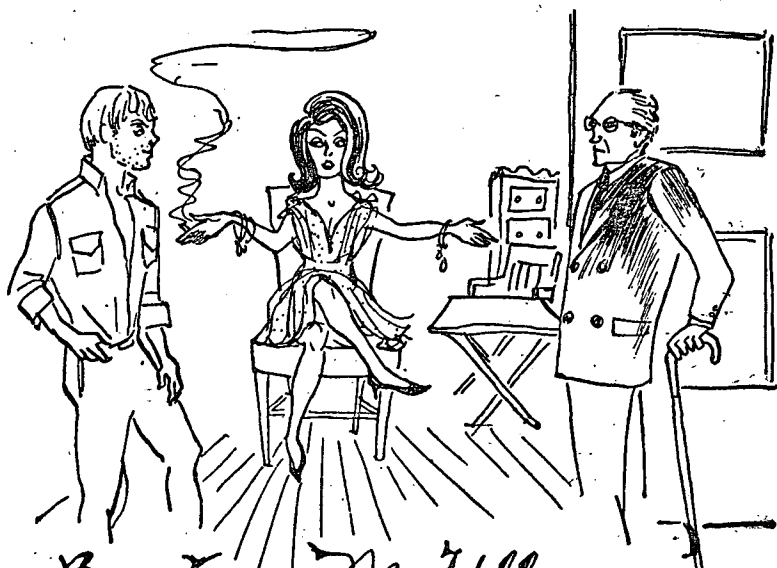
Puzzled, Joey turned. He was a thin, bony-shouldered youth,

garbed in work pants and a sport shirt.

"You're the Marco boy, aren't you?" she went on. "Joey Marco?"

"That's me." He came closer.

A SOUND INVESTMENT



By James M. Ullman

The woman, a brunette, had heavy-lidded eyes, full lips and a slightly receding chin. She was about thirty, and wore a filmy, low-cut summer dress. "You interested in part-time work?" she asked. "Good pay? Short hours?"

"That depends," he said cautiously.

"Well, get in," she ordered. "I don't wanna discuss it on the street." She added, "I'm Helene."

She slid behind the wheel. Joey climbed into the car. As she put her foot on the gas pedal and turned the ignition key, her skirt hiked up. Joey stared at her legs.

"What's the matter?" she asked casually. "Never seen a grown-up woman before?"

"Sorry," he smiled, "but you can't blame a guy for admiring. How come you know me?"

"I been checking around," she replied vaguely, and wheeled the car into traffic with surprising ease.

Joey had never seen a woman drive so well. She knew the car's clearances to a fraction of an inch, slipping unhesitatingly through spaces where Joey was sure the car wouldn't pass. "You drive good," he observed.

"It's my specialty," she answered, eyes on the road. "I hear yours used to be running, before you got caught in a holdup and they sent you away."

"That's right. I was a dash man. City high champ."

"How old are you now?"

"Twenty-two."

"Think you can still run?"

"Sure."

"We'll see." The car swung around a corner and onto a boulevard that cut through a city park.

"I think you're nuts," Joey said matter-of-factly. "Why don't you let me out here?"

"Because I think you'll want the job. Oh, I know how it is. You're an ex-con. You can't get regular work, so you pick up a tough buck an hour now and then, tossing bundles around or delivering handbills. And maybe at night you roll drunks or knock off a delicatessen."

"Just a minute—"

"You didn't think I was talking about honest work, did you? If you did, I'll drive you home."

Joey said nothing.

Silently, she drove to a part of the city he didn't know, parked on a business street in a decaying residential neighborhood, then led him into a dusty secondhand store. A sign in the window proclaimed KRUEGER FURNITURE. No customers were in sight. Looking at the junk strewn about, Joey could figure why.

Helene walked through the store and opened a door which appar-

ently led to living quarters in the back. "Hey, Carl," she yelled.

"Right there," a man hollered back.

Helene strolled to an old chair and sat down. "Make yourself comfortable," she invited. She crossed her legs and lit a cigarette. Joey couldn't take his eyes from her and she didn't seem to mind.

A man limped into the room from the back, supporting himself with a cane. Joey judged him to be about forty-five. He was of medium height, with red hair and broad shoulders, a thick chest and a very slim middle. His flat nose had been broken once. His chin was square and his eyes, shielded by steel-rimmed glasses, were alert and unblinking.

"This," Helene said, "is my husband, Carl Krueger."

"And you," Krueger said, "must be Joey Marco. Can you still run?"

Joey nodded.

"That's good." Krueger waved his cane. "Sit down, Joey. I don't think any customers will disturb us."

Joey sat on a sofa, eyeing Krueger warily. Krueger limped over and sat beside him.

"I heard of you," Krueger explained, "from a friend who watched you in a prison baseball game. He said you were the fastest man he'd ever seen. And that's

what I want, a fast young man."

"Get to the point," Joey said nervously.

"Sure. You know the telephone holdup gag?"

"The through-the-window bit?"

"Right. At night someone calls up a clerk in a store with a big plate glass window facing the street. The caller tells the clerk a high-powered rifle is trained right on her from out in the dark somewhere, and if she makes a wrong move she'll be killed. She's ordered to take the money from the register, put it in a bag and throw it out the door. The clerk usually does just that, even though the stunt is a bluff."

"Is that why you want a runner? To pick up the bag?"

"Exactly."

Joey shrugged. "I dunno. Is it worth the effort? How much can you get from an old lady tending a register in a lousy cleaning shop? Fifty, sixty bucks, maybe. To make it pay, you'd have to pull the stunt every night, and if you did that, everyone in town would get wise."

"That's true," Krueger said "but I plan to try for big scores only. Pick a job where the potential payoff is high; pick a victim known to be timid enough to fall for the bluff. Pull a successful job only every few months or so."

"Where'll you find jobs like

that? They don't grow on trees."

Krueger grinned. "I have contacts who'll find 'em for a percentage. I'll make the phone calls. You scoop up the money and Helene will drive your getaway car. It's almost risk-proof. If the victim puts the money out, we score. If she doesn't, you and Helene will be out of the neighborhood before the cops show."

"If the victim doesn't cooperate," Joey pointed out, "there's no payoff."

Krueger nodded. "I don't expect we'll bat a thousand. We'll have some failures. But crime's a business to me, Joey. It took me half a lifetime in prison to figure that out, so now I'm businesslike. Here's my deal. I'll put you on retainer. I'll mail you forty bucks cash, each and every week. That should pay your room rent and give you enough, plus what you earn on your own, to get by between jobs. You got to earn something honest on your own because you need the front. That's why I bought this junk furniture store. I learned upholstery and woodworking in prison shops and now, if the cops come around and ask, I got an honest business."

"What's my split on a score?"

"Twenty-five per cent."

"That's not much."

"It's a lot, considering I'll pay

you about two thousand bucks a year just to be on hand the few times I need you, and considering Helene's entitled to a share in each job. Nobody can handle a car as good as she can."

Joey shook his head. "It's the screwiest thing I ever heard of."

"When you get older," Krueger said, "you'll hear of things even screwier. You're lucky. You're getting a chance to see how professionals operate before they put you away for so long the knowledge won't do you any good. By the way, when we make a good score, I'd advise you to put your share into safekeeping. Don't spend it recklessly. Build a nest egg. For one thing, if you're arrested you'll be able to hire a good lawyer."

"Look, dad, you can tell me how to pull a job, but what I do with my money is my business. Confidentially, when we score I plan to celebrate, in a very big way. Okay?"

Krueger smiled. "Okay. If that's how you want it."

On each of the next three Fridays, Joey received forty dollars in cash in the mail. It was enough to permit him to get by with just a minimum of part-time work. Then, on a Monday, an unsigned note ordered him to be at the northwest corner of Clay and Jackson at nine the next morning.

Helene picked him up there at

nine a.m. precisely. It was going to be a scorcher, with temperatures predicted in the nineties. She wore a snug blouse and form-fitting pink stretch pants.

After they drove a few minutes, Joey said, "This isn't the way to the furniture store."

"We're not going there." Helene offered no further explanation, so Joey settled back and lit a cigarette, studying her.

"You mind," he asked finally, "if I say something personal? You're a beautiful woman. A beautiful *young* woman, even if you are a few years older than me. Not that those few years make any difference."

The expression on her face was enigmatic, but her lips curled in a hint of a smile. "So?"

"Your husband, Carl, is a little old for you, isn't he?"

"Don't underestimate him. He's a smart man."

"That's not what I meant."

"I know what you meant. You kids, you're all the same." She said it gently though. "Look, Joey. You seem to be a nice boy, much nicer than the people Carl usually deals with. If I begin to like you a little, don't let it go to your head. Carl's still my husband."

"That's important?"

"Like I told you," Helene repeated, "he's smart, and there comes

a time when that means something to a woman. Carl makes lots of money. He's got other people on his payroll, people with other specialties. There's a man named Harry, who can practically climb walls. And Floyd—well, never mind what Floyd does."

"How'd you get mixed up with Carl in the first place?"

"He and my father were cellmates. When my father died in prison, Carl and I were his only mourners. I had it pretty tough as a kid, and when Carl got out he promised to take care of me for the rest of my life."

Helene made a few more turns, then parked in front of a variety store. Carl Krueger limped toward them, opened the rear door and flopped onto the back seat.

He got right to the point. "Helene brought you here so you could see our target in daylight."

"We're taking the variety store?"

"No. The supermarket across the street."

Joey turned. It was an independently owned store, fairly large, but not as large as those in supermarket chains.

"The cashier's cage," Krueger went on, "is to the right, well away from the checkout counters. Friday nights, the cashier has a lot of money for cashing paychecks. The regular cashier just quit. The tem-

porary one is a nervous old woman, a Mrs. Walters, the type most likely to fall for the telephone gag. The store closes at 9 p.m., so at 8:30 Friday, Joey, you go into the phone booth in the corner drugstore. From the booth, you can see most of the store's interior. As soon as Mrs. Walters is alone, phone me at the number I'll give you, a phone booth miles from here. Let the phone ring six times, then hang up. If there are people near the cashier, don't ring me. If I don't hear from you by 8:50, we'll postpone the job for a week."

"And after I ring you six times?"

"I'll phone the supermarket and ask for Mrs. Walters. I'll tell her I'm watching from an office across the street; that I have a confederate, an expert marksman, with a rifle trained on her, and she'll be killed if she doesn't follow instructions. She's to fill a shopping bag with currency. Then she's to carry the bag outside, put it down, return to the cage and keep her back to the street for five minutes."

"While she's doing that, where am I supposed to be?"

"You'll leave the drugstore, stroll toward the supermarket and stand outside the window. You'll be watching Mrs. Walters every second, and if she hangs up on me or signals for help, keep on walking to the corner and turn right. Hel-

ene will be in a car parked a half-block down that street. But if Mrs. Walters puts the money out, you walk over, pick it up, then walk away. Don't run unless necessary. The fewer people who notice you, the better."

"I think I've got it."

"Good. Now get out and spend the rest of the morning exploring the block. Helene will drive me back to the furniture store and return here at noon. When she does, show her all the places where you might turn up if your planned route to the car is barred. Get to know every gangway, every backyard fence, every potential escape route as well as any kid in the neighborhood knows them. I won't see you again until the job's over, one way or another, Friday night."

Helene returned for Joey exactly as scheduled. Krueger ran a businesslike operation, all right. They circled the block, Joey pointing out the routes he might use if he ran into trouble, and then Helene said, "I'm with it; so now I'll take you home."

"What's your hurry?"

"You got something else in mind?"

"Let's go back to the park," he suggested. "It's a hot day. We'll sit in the shade, drink cold beer, eat a few sandwiches and watch the world go by."

"You're sure it's the world you'll watch?"

"With the outfit you're wearing," he admitted; "I guess you know what I'll be watching."

She laughed. "You're persistent, aren't you?" There was a liquor store ahead, and she parked in front of it. "Okay. Carl's not expecting me for lunch, and I haven't been on a picnic in centuries. Get the beer, I'll buy us some grub."

They found a secluded spot on the bank of a lagoon, where Joey spread a blanket from the car. After they ate, Helene made him tell her about prison. It was easy to talk to her, since her late father and her husband had been convicts, and Joey went on for nearly an hour, getting all the hatred and bitterness off his chest.

When he was through, Helene lay back, her eyes closed. "Joey, this job with Carl—why are you doing it? What do you expect to get out of it? You're not like Carl, you're still young enough to make it in some honest business."

"So are you."

"It's too late for me. I was committed to this life years ago, but you could still get out. Start saving your money, Joey, the way Carl suggested. Ask his advice on how to invest it, and when your stake's big enough, leave town. Go where nobody knows you and buy a store

or gas station or something. That's what Floyd's planning to do. He says—"

Joey leaned over and kissed her—lightly. It should be lightly, the first time, and she didn't resist.

He pulled his head back. Her eyes were open wide now.

"Never mind Carl," he said, "and Floyd, and that crazy idea about saving money. Money's your best friend; you don't lock it up in a bank, you spend it. So let's concentrate on you and me."

He started to kiss her again, but she twisted away and got quickly to her feet. "No hard feelings, Joey. But for a million reasons, what you're thinking just wouldn't do for either of us."

"We'll see." Smiling, he rose. She'd come around eventually, he was increasingly sure of that. He could sense it in her, the yearning for affection, even the kind he offered. It must be miserable for her, living with a cold fish like Krueger. "Like you said, I'm a very persistent guy."

A light rain fell, and the pavement glistened. That was good. The rain had cut business in the supermarket. Only a few customers were in sight. With fewer checks to be cashed, there'd be more money in the cashier's cage.

It was 8:32 p.m. Friday, and as

Joey slipped into the phone booth, he saw Mrs. Walters alone in the cashier's cage. This was the time to strike. Both checkout girls were occupied ringing up large orders, and the store manager had disappeared somewhere in back.

His heart pounding, Joey dialed the number of the phone booth in which Krueger waited. After the phone rang six times, he hung up, and the dime dropped down into the slot.

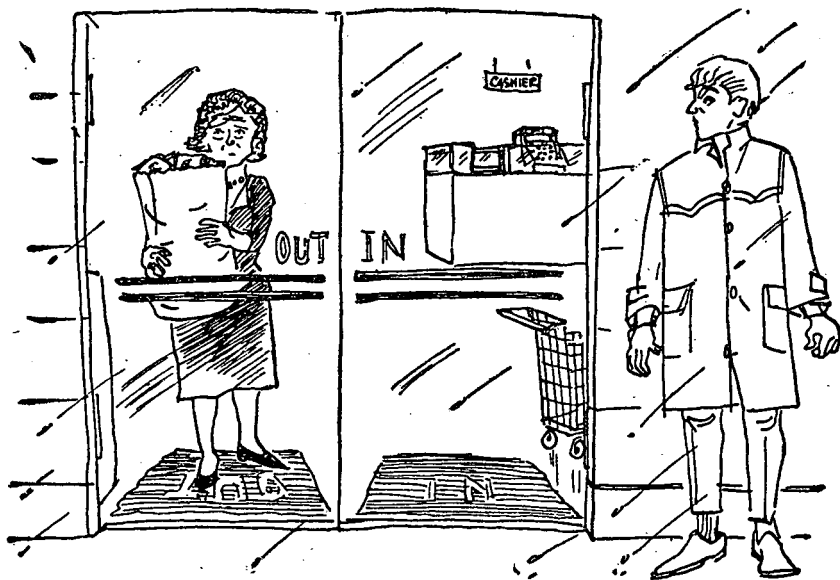
Joey slipped the coin into his pocket and walked out of the booth. The woman behind the cigar counter didn't even look up as he passed. On the sidewalk, he paused a moment. Mrs. Walters had

just reached for her own phone, and now she tensed, putting a hand on the edge of the cage to steady herself.

Slowly, Joey crossed the street. Mrs. Walters was a nervous type, all right. For a moment, he thought she'd go to pieces, but she pulled herself together, reached for a shopping bag, and frantically began to stuff money into it.

Joey was standing outside the supermarket, perhaps fifteen yards from the entrance, when Mrs. Walters stumbled out of the cage with the bag and walked hurriedly to the door, which swung open as she broke the electric eye's beam.

She dropped the bag to the side-



walk. She was in such a panic, though, that she walked right back into the exit door, which didn't budge, since it only opened out. Wailing, she fell to her knees.

Quickly, Joey walked toward the bag. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw a customer in the store point, as a man in a white jacket ran forward from the produce department.

Joey shed caution. He scooped up the bag and sprinted along the sidewalk, brushing past one pedestrian and almost knocking another down. He heard a shout.

Joey rounded the corner. Ahead, a car's lights snapped on and a motor popped. The front door swung open. Joey dived inside, and slammed the door. Helene knifed the car into the street, accelerating so fast that Joey was flattened against the cushions. The car squealed around three or four corners and then slowed to a legal speed.

"They saw the car," Helene said tautly, "but they weren't able to follow." She wore dark slacks, a black sweater and a man's cap, which she removed now, letting her hair tumble.

"Whose car is this?" Joey asked, breathing heavily.

"Stolen. It's not on the hot sheet yet, though. Anyway, we'll switch cars soon, so collect that money.

When you got in, some of it fell out of the bag."

Joey reached for the bills on the floor, while Helene braked the car at a stop sign, then gunned it down a ramp to an expressway.

"Don't take your gloves off," she warned. "The cops will go over the car for prints."

"You know," Joey exulted, "I didn't think it'd work."

"Carl can be damned convincing. I feel sorry for that old woman."

"Jeez, there's lots of money here."

"Don't count it yet. We're still not clear."

Ignoring her, Joey pawed through the bag. "Must be eight, ten thousand. Maybe more. I never saw so much money. And two or three grand of it's mine . . ."

Another mile, and they left the expressway, twisting along a maze of side streets to a deserted industrial section, where Helene parked. They got out and ran to another car, Joey carrying the bag.

"Where are we going now?"

"To pick up Carl," Helene said, "and split the take." She drove them back to the expressway. "Well," she added wearily, "we're all right now. This car's nothing like the one we got away in, and with the cap on, in the dark I looked like a man. They're not looking for a woman driver."

"Carl figures all the angles, does-

n't he? Calculates all the odds?"

"Sonny, he sure does."

Yawning, Joey stretched. "With my share," he drawled, "I'll head down to Mexico and live like a king until the cash runs out. I'll stay at a swank motel and have me everything I want."

"Carl told me you had some crazy stunt like that on your mind."

"You still want me to invest it? The way Carl does?" Joey laughed.

"That's rich. He's married to a good-looking woman like you, but he hoards his pennies and makes you live in a sleazy dump behind a second-hand furniture store. If you were my wife, Helene—"

"I told you, kid, I'm Carl's wife, and he's done a lot for me."

"If you were my wife," Joey went on relentlessly, "I'd take you out of that slum and fly you to Acapulco or somewhere. You deserve it. I bet Carl hasn't given you a chance to live it up for years."

"We're thinking of the future."

"Future, smoocher. You might not have a future. You might get killed tomorrow, hit by a car while crossing a street. Carl's all wrong, Helene. He shouldn't make you live in that hole. He should set you up in a fancy apartment and buy you nice clothes, while you're still young enough to enjoy those things."

She didn't reply.

Now was the time, Joey decided, to make his pitch. "Look, why don't you tell Carl you want a little vacation of your own? A week or two in Mexico to rest up, until the heat from this job dies down. I won't tell him where I'm going, and we can meet there. All day, we'll just lounge around the beach, or go shopping. And at night—"

"Shut up," Helene snapped. "Not another word. I don't wanna hear any more about it."

"Sure." Joey shrugged. He'd expected some protest, but the vehemence of Helene's reply surprised him. He was getting to her, all right. "But think it over. I'm not leaving for a week."

A moment later they drove off the expressway and wound through a slum. Finally, Helene parked in a block of empty buildings, vacated to make way for an urban renewal project. About thirty yards from them, a shadowy figure lurked in a doorway.

"That's Carl," Helene said. "He didn't want you to be seen at the store tonight. Go help him, his leg was bothering him earlier."

Annoyed at the request, Joey opened the door and climbed out. "What's wrong with his damn leg?"

"Riot gun blast, the last time he was arrested."

Frowning, Joey walked toward

the doorway. The thought of touching Krueger revolted him somehow. Poor Helene, on top of everything else she must have to be his nurse.

Joey was about halfway to the figure when he realized it wasn't Carl. This man was taller, and there was something different about the cane. It was cradled under his arm, the tip not touching the ground.

The man stepped into the light. He was younger than Carl, his features a lean, stony mask, and the thing under his arm was a short-barreled rifle.

Helene put her head out the car window and shouted, "He's the one, Floyd." She gunned the motor; the car squealed from the curb.

Instinctively, Joey turned and ran. Despite the sudden, gut-churning fear that was overwhelming him, he thought clearly enough to know that if he could reach the mouth of the nearest alley and duck down it, he'd have a chance. His legs flashed, and the rubber soles of his sneakers thumped on the pavement.

Unhurried, Floyd dropped to one knee, in the trained marksman's kneeling position. He fired once. Joey was dead before he hit the sidewalk.

Carl Krueger lit a cigar and

gazed at the money, which was stacked neatly on a table. "Good haul, Helene. More than eleven thousand. But we won't try that stunt again for a long time, not after the publicity that'll follow this job."

"How much," Helene asked, "did we net?" They were back in the apartment behind the furniture store, and Helene sat in a chair, filing her nails.

Carl swept the money back into the bag, limped to an open safe and shoved the bag into it. "Let's see, our expenses came to about twenty-five hundred. Floyd's fee for the contract on Joey, fees for the rental of two stolen cars, ten per cent to the man who found the job for us, plus those three payments of forty dollars to Joey. That leaves us a profit of more than eighty-five hundred."

"I wonder about Joey, Carl. You never made me do anything like that before; you always left me out of it. He was a good kid. As I told you last week, I don't think you gave him much of a chance."

"He had plenty of chance," Krueger argued. "I told him to save his money. I even agreed to let you lead him on a little, to try to talk some sense into him, but he wouldn't listen. I met plenty of his kind in the penitentiary. He'd spend his share on a binge, the cops would

wonder where an ex-con got all that dough, and our whole operation would be endangered. If they could tie him to the supermarket job, they'd pick him up and induce him to turn state's evidence. Even if they didn't, they'd watch him and learn he worked for me, ruining the respectable front it took so long to establish."

Laboriously, Carl crossed the room, turned on a television set, and sank into a chair. "Anyhow, look at it this way. Disposing of Joey was a sound investment. If we'd cut him in for his twenty-five per cent, our net would have been less than seven thousand, and we'd have had to go on paying him forty a week, even though we wouldn't need him again until next year. Hell, we can always get another runner."

"I suppose you're right. Just the same—"

"Forget Joey," Carl advised. "We'll take our eighty-five hundred and do like always; half in the savings and loan, half in stocks."

"How much are we worth now?" Helen asked.

"Eighty-five, ninety thousand. Some of our stocks dropped last month, but they'll bounce back."

"I been thinking." Helene lit a cigarette. "Why don't we take a trip? To Mexico, maybe. We could use a vacation. We've been going like this for five years, one job after another. I'm tired."

Carl snorted in disgust. "Kid stuff. I thought you knew better. When you've got money you treat it with respect. You make it work for you."

"It's been so long."

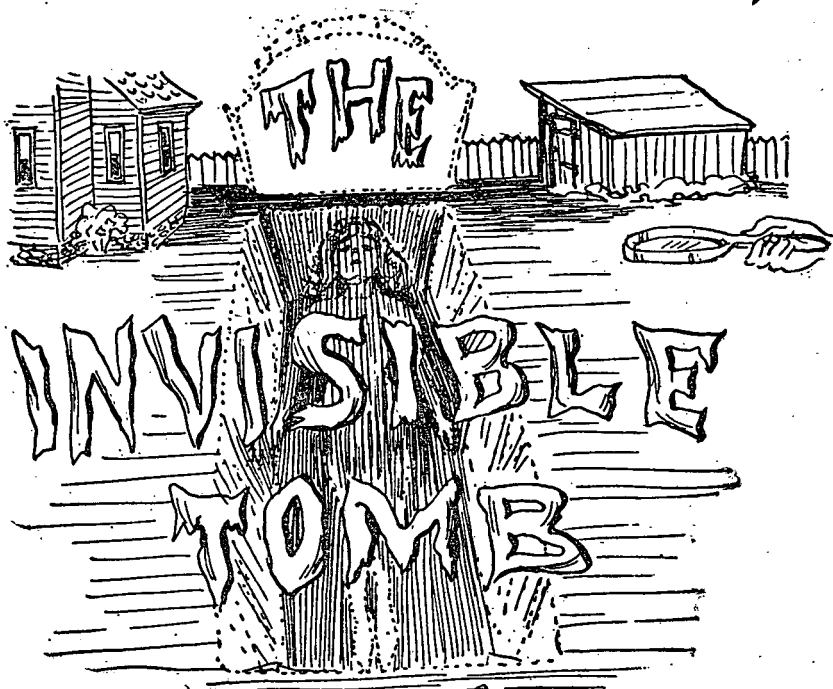
"Can that!" Krueger frowned. "Oh yeah, I promised Floyd we'd pay him tonight. Put a thousand in an envelope, hey, and take it to his place. That's the lug's standard fee for a homicide."

"All right." Helene rose. "I'm still on edge, I can use the air."

She found an envelope, put two thousand dollars in it, instead of one, and turned the store lights on as she walked out. When she phoned later and Carl came out to answer, he'd make a perfect target. Floyd could get him right through the window.



From the childhood game, I SPY, many of us learned, "Plain as the nose on your face," invariably created a psychological blind.



By
ARTHUR FORGES

CAPTAIN GREGG, in common with some other normally hardheaded people, believed that related events tend to occur in triples. Having just struggled through two cases that involved tricky hiding places—first, one involving a ruby; sec-

ond, a rare book—he was not altogether surprised to confront the problem of a missing body.

It was, naturally, the worst of the sequence. It's easy enough to hide small objects, but to dispose of roughly one hundred pounds of

woman, and in a relatively limited space, is another matter; Gregg could hardly believe it. But unless the murderer had somehow carried the remains through twenty miles of suburban streets to what precious little open country—three-cow “ranches” and the like—existed in so densely populated an area, there to be buried in a shallow grave certain to be found, what alternatives were possible? No, Elsa Newman must be in the Newman basement, house, or yard. Only she wasn’t, if Gregg knew anything about conducting a search.

In the other two cases, the criminals had found by brilliant ingenuity—one had to give them that much—how small items like a gem and a book could be hidden almost in plain sight, on the *Purloined Letter* principle, and baffle the most competent detective.

Certainly they had fooled Gregg, forcing him to get help, unorthodox, but effective, in order to solve the seemingly impossible puzzles presented by the talented crooks; and now, for the third time, Gregg was driven to seek out his peculiar consultant. He didn’t enjoy having to do it, but knew when he was licked.

Julian Morse Trowbridge looked like a dissipated gnome badly hungover from too much ferment-

ed toadstool juice, or whatever the species imbibes when on a bender. His vast, pallid face, moist and unhealthy in its flabbiness, was set on a thready neck. As for his torso, that suggested the ultimate “Before” of the most exaggerated advertisement for a physical culture course. But inside the big, bullet-shaped head was a remarkable brain, packed with esoteric knowledge instantly available on call.

Trowbridge had graduated from Harvard at fourteen, and two years later had a PhD in mathematical physics, but his intellect was decades ahead of his emotional balance, so the boy had broken down and fled from the academic world. Now, at fifty, he lived in a ramshackle house full of books, where he acted as a kind of neighborhood Solomon, handing out free, and usually quite good, advice to all those who asked for it.

When Captain Gregg came for the third time in as many months, he found the gnome explaining patiently, in precise and pedantic terms, a theorem in calculus to a pimply boy whose one burning aim was to con the old creep into doing his homework for him.

“Continuity does *not* imply differentiability,” Trowbridge assured the young seeker-after-truth. “Remember that, my boy, and all difficulties with this kind of problem

will vanish," he added brusquely.

He politely ushered the student to the door and, sighing with relief, turned to Gregg.

"I take it you didn't do him much good," the detective said dryly.

"I fear you are right; the chap simply hasn't the brains for college. It's a dreadful thing to say, but I really think he does not fully grasp the idea of a function. However," with a twinkling glance at Gregg, "you've done fairly well under the same handicap. Your problem, I'm sure, is not mathematical."

"Things happen in threes," he detective said. "Twice I've been to you about stuff hidden where anybody should have been able to find it, and nobody could until Trowbridge showed the way. Well, this time it's a whole body—a woman; height, five-four; weight, ninety-eight. Missing two weeks now; presumed dead—by me—but no body, even though, incredibly, she ought to be hidden right in the house or the smallish yard. If it weren't for the last two cases, I wouldn't dream of her being that handy, but now—"

The gnome sank deeper in the enormous, sagging, musty armchair he favored.

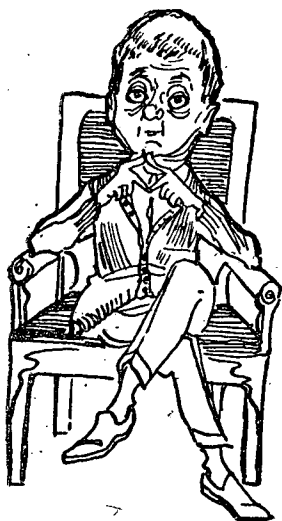
"Ahhh," he sighed happily. Of all the problems brought to him,

he most enjoyed puzzling crimes; they added glamor to his emotionally starved existence. Math was fascinating, but too bloodless. "Tell me about it. Who's your suspect, and why?"

"It's a simple case as to motive and probable killer. Leo Newman's the guy. He's big, ugly, bald, has a pot—and a pretty wife. Brought her back from Germany in 1949. She was only sixteen, and obviously wanted to get away from the mess there. Elsa Keller was her name; blonde, very cute, and flirtatious; the kind of wife who invites the mailman in for coffee—or the grocery boy; the phone installer; anything male that's handy. Newman fought with her often, and threatened to kill her. The neighbors heard them going at it.

"Well, two weeks ago she disappeared. People next door say she and Newman were battling again, that she stopped screaming at him very suddenly. Then it was quiet, and stayed that way.

"He claims she ran away, but nobody saw her leave. There's no evidence of her taking bus, train, or plane, and all her clothes are in the house except, possibly, what she was wearing at the time. Now I figure he lost his temper and killed her, maybe not intending to. Then he disposed of the body somehow. But where? There are



square miles of tidy little lawns, and then more roomy suburbs, but no place a body could be buried and not found fast. His own house is an old one and quite big, with attics and plenty of crawl spaces; but, hell, Julian, no spot where we couldn't find a woman's corpse. He didn't chop her up, because that *always* leaves traces—blood, tissue, something—the crime-lab boys are sure to find.

"That's really the whole bit. She's gone, but couldn't have run off; so she must be dead. But if so, where did he hide her?"

"That depends, I would say," Trowbridge said calmly, "on how ingenious Mr. Leo Newman is. Is he ingenious?"

"In a way. He's handy, that's certain. Has a big shed full of

tools, drills, a lathe; welding, soldering, and brazing equipment; concrete mixes; boxes of bolts, nuts, pipes, chains. Obviously he could repair or make a lot of things, but that's not the same as inventing an invisible grave."

"She's not buried in the small yard, of course."

"You just bet not. We probed every square inch. The lawn hasn't been touched."

"How does he behave?"

"Like a guilty man, I'd say. Very uneasy, as if he weren't at all sure he'd fooled us. Insisted she ran off with one of her many lovers, but wasn't angry—just scared. After we'd searched the place for hours, the next day he moved out to a hotel. I wonder why. Why pay rent when you have your own house? I guessed at first he did have her stashed inside somehow, and knew that after a few days in this warm weather it would be . . . well . . . unpleasant and a dead giveaway. But we've been back twice, with warrants, sniffing around, and there's nothing. So you see—" Gregg shrugged.

"I would be inclined to agree," the gnome said, "that there must be some particular significance in his moving out, but without more data it would be foolish to speculate. May I have a dossier, the usual things, to work with?"

"You bet," the detective assured him. He put a large, scabrous briefcase on Trowbridge's desk, which seemed already sagging under dozens of dusty books, each fatter than the next. "You'll find everything inside: Newman's statements; pictures of him and Elsa; photos of house and grounds; miscellaneous information, like his cheapness," Gregg added bitterly. "He must have known we'd go over the house a few more times, so he had all the utilities shut off; no gas, water, or electricity. On a dark day, or at night, we have to use flashlights. If it was winter, we'd freeze. Naturally, our warrants don't entitle us to use Newman's utilities! I suppose it's the only way he can get back at us; can't keep us out, but he can make our work harder."

Trowbridge cocked his great head. "Spite?" he said softly. "I wonder. How very odd!"

"What are you getting at?" Gregg asked quickly. "Did I miss something again?"

"Nothing; nothing," was the hasty reply, "except that your big, burly, bullying kind doesn't usually get spiteful in so womanish a way. I'll have to think about it."

"Give me a ring, as usual, if you come up with an angle," the detective said.

"Of course," the gnome said, re-

proach in his voice, escorting Gregg to the door.

The call would probably come at three in the morning, the detective knew, but that couldn't be helped. Trowbridge had his own cycles of activity, more like those of some distant planet than of earth.

Gregg was wrenched from his deepest sleep of the night at four a.m., as it happened. He fumbled for the phone, hopeful but justifiably querulous. Why couldn't Trowbridge have waited another two hours? Then he felt a pang of guilt; after all, the little guy was trying to help in his own way.

"It is I—Julian," the phone announced pedantically.

"That figures," the detective groaned. "Whatchu got?"

"Maybe nothing, but there's a logical inference," one of his pet phrases, "*provided* your conviction that the body wasn't removed from the premises is sound."

"I think it is," Gregg said, wide awake now. "Everything indicates Newman stuck close to the neighborhood up to the time of our search. Just went to his job, did some shopping, and came home. No long drives, judging from odometer and what his garage says. So let's have your theory."

"I build on the matter of his moving out," the gnome said cau-

tiously. "Did he have the utilities stopped because of leaving, or was his change to a hotel the excuse for cutting them off? That's the vital point."

"What's the point in having no service at the house? We still searched."

"If they were on, and he still living there, you might wonder why no hot water," was the cryptic reply.

"No hot water," Gregg repeated. Then he gulped. "Hey, are you suggesting—no, it can't be! She was small, but there isn't that much space in a heater! It's not all hollow, has a million pipes and fittings."

"Not really. The actual tank is almost big enough, but any pipes are easily burned out with a torch. You did say, and the dossier confirms, that he knows how to use one."

"Sure, but—"

"All right. He removes the top, cleans out the whole cylinder, which your photos of the house show is a biggish one. The few holes for pipes are quickly welded

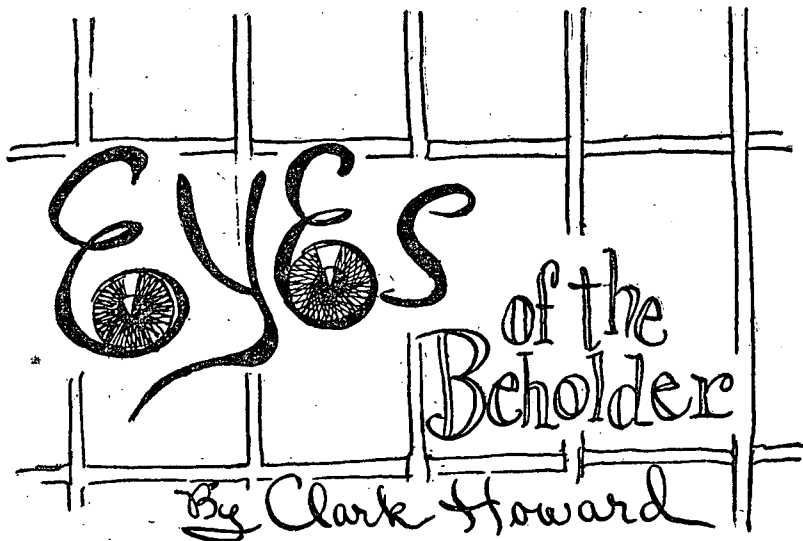
shut, but so that nothing shows on the outside. Not," he added maliciously, "that anybody took much of a look. Then he puts the body inside, welds the top back on, and has a hermetically sealed, metal tomb—in plain sight, but invisible psychologically. The pipes he adds to his junk piles, already full of such stuff. Oh, it's a wild gamble, but he's scared and desperate. If you once overlook the tank, he can wait you out for months until all surveillance stops. Hermetically sealed, remember, a perfect tomb. But no hot water! Hence the hotel. Make sense?"

There was a pregnant silence for some moments, then the detective managed, "Yes, but I won't believe it until we open the thing! Logic is fine, Julian, but so is sanity. Imagine the gall in stashing her right under our noses. That smarts!" He gave a short, barking laugh. "I'll never sleep now; I'm going to check right away."

When the invisible tomb was opened, two hours later, they found the crumpled remains of Elsa Keller Newman.



Several kinds of character are supposedly bestowed by nature, but ultimately, "One's eyes are what one is."



VERONICA HORNE was the personification of poise and composure as she sat across the desk from the uniformed man with the mustache and listened to the various disclaimers he injected into the making of their bargain.

"You understand, Senora Horne, that even after I have arranged to let you talk to Corona, there is no guarantee that he will consent to your proposition."

"Of course," Veronica said. "The doctor who directed me to you

warned me this Corona might be difficult to deal with. What sort of person is he, exactly?"

The uniformed man rolled his eyes toward the ceiling. "A devil of the first order, Senora. One of the worst rebels our struggling little country has ever known. For years he has organized the peasants in every province, incited the citizenry to riots, preached the overthrow of our government. Believe me, Senora, we captured him not a moment too soon."

Veronica nodded. "So now he is to be shot?"

"But of course," the officer said with a shrug. "For treason there is no other penalty. It is worse than murder."

"Yes," Veronica said quietly, "worse than murder."

She rose and walked to the window. Looking out across the broad plaza fronting the prison, she thought briefly of her late husband, Edward. No, she told herself, that wasn't murder, not really. Edward had been old—oh, not old in years, perhaps; he hadn't quite reached sixty—but old in body and mind, tired all the time, and dull. How maddeningly dull! And his heart *had* been bad; only a question of time, really, until he would have died on his own. Substituting sugar pills for his heart tablets had deprived him of only two, perhaps three years, and had given her an entire new life. An entire new life—and Blain.

Veronica turned from the window and walked back to her chair, aware that the uniformed man's eyes were admiring her from behind the desk, sweeping over the tailored linen dress that fit her so well, noting, no doubt, that even though she quite obviously was approaching forty, she was still firm of body and throat, still carried herself with the ease and con-

fidence of a much younger woman.

She smiled inwardly. *Blain, she thought, has given me back my youth. As long as I have him, I shall never grow old.*

Seating herself again, she said, "May I see Corona now?"

"Certainly. I regret that I will have to ask you to talk to him in his cell; security, you understand."

"Will I be safe?"

"Completely, Senora. Men like Corona are dangerous only to governments, never to beautiful women." He stood and reached for his garrison hat. Smiling, he said, "Forgive me for being indelicate, Senora, but the doctor who sent you to me mentioned that, in return for my little breach of regulations in permitting you to see Corona you might be inclined to make a small contribution to our officers' fund. In a country as poor as ours, we who serve the government are not reimbursed as adequately as one might imagine."

"I understand." Veronica took an envelope from her purse and handed it to him. "I think you will find this sufficient."

The uniformed man thumbed quickly through the bills in the envelope and widened his smile. "Not only sufficient, Senora, but most generous. It will be greatly appreciated by my fellow officers."

If they ever see any of it, Veron-

ica thought knowingly. But then, that was none of her concern. She was only thankful that Edward, before he had grown old and dull, had managed to accumulate a sizeable enough estate to allow her to do this thing she was doing for Blain. All right then, not for Blain, she answered her blanching conscience, but for herself, because she needed Blain.

"If you will come with me, Senora, I will take you to Corona's cell," the smiling, considerably richer, uniformed man with the mustache said, interrupting her mental semantics.

"Yes, of course."

The face of the condemned man, Corona, was cleanlined but not handsome. Like the countenance of most men who harbor rebellious natures and ultimately die for hopeless causes, his features gave an initial impression of sternness, and it was only upon lengthy, close association that one came to know that the exterior hardness represented not what it seemed, not sternness at all, but merely long-accustomed futility.

In the presence of this soon-to-be-shot rebel, standing by herself inside the cell door that had just been locked behind her, Veronica remained motionless and allowed the man to stare at her for as long as he liked; allowed him to lie

there almost insolently on his cot, a newspaper still open in his hands, projecting no surprise at seeing a tall, blonde *Americano* woman ushered into his place of captivity and left there alone. He looked at her and studied her, but only her face, she noticed; not the rest of her as some men, too few these days, did.

It was his cell, she reasoned coolly, and what she wanted of him was his also. She being the buyer and he the seller, she would let him direct their time together in any way he chose.

It was several moments before Corona spoke, and when he did his voice was flat and toneless. "Why are you here?"

"I was sent to see you by the doctor who examines the prisoners," she said.

He nodded a barely perceptible nod. "And you want?"

She hesitated only the briefest of instances, half a heartbeat, before answering. "I want your eyes."

There, it was said. It was done. That simple.

Corona continued to stare at her, his heavy lids half closed, lips together in a swollen line, hands—dark, rough, scarred—holding the lowered newspaper as still as marble.

"Did you understand me?"

"I understood what you said; I

did not understand what you meant."

Veronica came forward into the cell and sat tentatively on the edge of a wooden chair facing the cot from the opposite wall. "I want to buy your eyes before you die."

"Why?"

"I need them, part of them, for someone who is going blind."

"You?"

"No. A friend."

Corona put the paper aside and sat up. "How much do you offer me for my eyes?" he asked curiously.

"Sixty thousand of your country's pesos."

"That is a lot of money. About

ten thousand of your dollars, I think." He pursed his lips thoughtfully. Then he shook his head. "No. I am sorry for your friend, and for you, but when I die, my eyes die with me. I do not wish to die without eyes." He saw disappointment cloud his visitor's face. "Perhaps you can find someone else."

Veronica shook her head. "No, there is no time. The disease that my friend has is only in the cornea of the eyes now, but it will soon spread into other parts and destroy the nerves. Then it will be hopeless." She leaned forward desperately. "Perhaps I could manage ninety thousand pesos—"



"Senora," the condemned man said quietly, "of what use would even a million pesos be to me? In six weeks they will come and take me out into the courtyard in the noonday sun, and line up men with rifles and they will kill me." A slight hint of a smile flowed over his lips. "Wherever I go after that, I will require no pesos."

"But don't you have a family you could leave the money to?"

"I am a revolutionary, Senora, a *bandido*. Outlaws have only followers, not family; we breed revolt, not children, and our followers bear arms, not descendants."

Veronica glanced furtively at the cell door to be certain they were still alone. "Leave the money to your followers, then; to help your cause."

Corona shook his head. "My people buy victory with their blood, not with *Americano* dollars."

"But surely there is someone, some *thing* that you care for that you—"

"There is one that I care for," Corona said. He stood and turned to a small barred window above his cot, and looked out and up at the sky. "A girl I have loved for a long time, and who has loved me for a long time. We were children together. We should have been married years ago, we should have

children of our own now, but—" He turned back to Veronica. "But I had another love, a very demanding love: my country. So—" He lifted one hand in a helpless salute.

"Wouldn't you want her to have the money?" Veronica asked. "Wouldn't it help her after you are gone?"

"Yes," he said softly, "it would. But I do not think she would take it. She is very independent, this girl. For thirteen years, since she was sixteen, she has refused to marry—I would not let her marry me because I was an outlaw. When her father tried to force her to marry, she ran away and he disowned her. Now she has no home, no husband, no life that is any good."

"You could give her a life that is good," Veronica said, "with the money."

"I do not think she would take it," he said again, shaking his head.

"Suppose it was sent to her? Would she throw it away?"

"She would know it came from me."

"Even if she did, surely she would not throw it away. What could she do but keep it?"

"I do not know," Corona said quietly. "I do not know what she would do."

"Isn't it worth a chance?" Veronica persisted. "A chance that she *might* use it to find a better life after you are gone?"

Corona sat back down on his cot and stared at the rough stone floor, his dark face frowning in thought. Veronica, nerve ends taut, remained absolutely still and quiet, mentally tearing at the roots of her hair and biting into the flesh of her lip in tormenting anxiety. *You have got to do it*, she silently commanded the condemned man, trying to force her own thoughts across the space between them and into the brooding, bowed head of Corona. *You have got to do it—for me, for me, for me!*

"If I did agree to what you want," Corona said finally, slowly, "when would it have to be done?"

"In two weeks," she said slowly. "As soon as the doctor has given you a series of injections."

"Injections?"

"Shots, with a needle. Protein and Vitamin A to strengthen your eyes before the operation."

Corona nodded. "So then I would be blind for a month before they shoot me. What about the prison officials?"

"That has been arranged. They will cooperate with the doctor and will tell no one. On the morning of—well, they will simply lead you out blindfolded; not even the news-

paper reporters will apprehend."

Corona stood up again and looked out the window.

"Send the money, ninety thousand pesos, to her, and I will begin the doctor's injections. If at the end of the two weeks she still has the money, I will let the doctor take my eyes for your friend. Do you agree to that?"

"Yes, yes, I do," Veronica said quickly, and opened her purse for paper and pen. "Give me her name and where to find her."

Over, she thought. *Over at last. Blain would see again!*

When she was ready to leave, Corona said quietly, "I hope for your friend's sake, and for hers, that she keeps the money."

"Yes," Veronica answered, "so do I."

Corona smiled. "She is a beautiful girl. Whenever I looked at her, I saw a sunbrowned madonna with the whole world for her halo. It is a pity we did not marry and have children."

"Yes, a pity," said Veronica, thinking, *Blain will see, and I will stay young forever!*

"I must go now," she told the man who had only six weeks to live.

"Adios," Corona said.

When she let herself into his hotel room, Veronica saw that

Blain had felt his way out onto the balcony. He was standing at the rail, staring up at the brilliant sun to see what little light still penetrated the horrible opaque tissue that had eaten away most of the corneas from his eyes and give his down her bag and went quietly to his side.

"Hello, darling," she said softly.

He turned to her, a tall, sensitive-faced man, some ten years her junior; his long, skilled, artist's fingers uncurled from the railing.

"It's cloudy today, isn't it, Ronnie?" he asked.

Veronica glanced up at the pure blue sky, the blinding yellow sun. She did not answer.

"Poor day to paint," Blain said. "I never liked to paint on cloudy days; the gloominess always managed to get on the canvas somehow."

"You'll soon be painting in the sun again, darling," Veronica said, taking his arm. "The doctor has found a donor for you." She felt his whole body tense under her hand.

"For certain," he forced the words, "or just another possibility?"

"For certain. I just spoke to him at his office. He's coming over any minute to give you your first shot, and then he's going to see the donor to do the same. In two



weeks you'll both be ready for the operation. Two weeks, darling, just imagine. *You'll see again, Blain. You'll see!*"

"The donor, who is it?"

"Some patient of the doctor's, a man who has only a few weeks to live."

"You don't know what it's meant to me, Ronnie," Blain told her now, "having you here and being able to depend on you like I have. Without you, I would have lost all hope by now."

"Blain—" She put her hand on his cheek, wanting desperately for him to take her in his arms, to at least hold her even though he could not see her; but then there was a knock at the door and the moment, their very first personal moment, was interrupted.

"That will be the doctor—" *And he will know exactly what to say,* Veronica thought, *because he too*

had become a part of her lie.

On the fifteenth day after Veronica had visited him in his cell, the condemned Corona somehow received verification from his followers that the sum of money, anonymously delivered to the woman he had named, had been retained by and was still in the possession of that woman. As far as Corona was concerned, that represented satisfaction of the bargain into which he had entered with the *Americano* woman, and he gave his consent for the doctor to remove the living corneas from his eyes and give his sight to another.

The corneal transplant—which is simply plastic surgery of the eye, nearly always successful, and much less involved than generally believed by laymen—was performed in the prison dispensary, under strict security enforced by the bribed military warden. Blain, of course, had no idea where he was, and no one spoke a word to enlighten him. Corona was sedated in his cell, brought into the dispensary unconscious, and never saw the man to whom he gave his vision. The three nurses, one of whom assisted, were all privately engaged by the doctor and sworn to secrecy. For the doctor himself it was routine surgery; he had performed that particular section some

forty times in his career and found it infinitely simpler than the more involved retina repairs. His fingers were as sure as time.

He finished with Corona, left him to the care of a nurse, and turned to Blain. The tiny needle-like instrument in his hand was accurate to the thousandth of an inch. In his fingers it dug, probed, cut, scraped and laid waste all the useless growth to make way for the living, still warm tissue that would replace it. The miracle was nearly complete. He turned and dropped the final instrument into a surgery pan and pulled the mask from his face.

"It is over," he announced. "Once again it is over."

In the hall he spoke briefly to Veronica. "The graft looks very good; I expect no complications. The bandages will be kept in place for two weeks. Give him the medication I left with the nurse. I will stop in to see him sometime tomorrow."

"Thank you, doctor," Veronica said, "thank you so much," but he was already walking away, and she was not sure he even heard her.

"The world is beautiful, Ronniel!"

It was two months after the operation. Blain's sight had returned gradually during the two weeks

since the bandages had been removed. Now for the first time he looked out on the plaza without dark glasses, and the true color of the world flooded his new eyes.

"You're not dizzy?" Veronica said, standing beside him on the balcony.

"No, that's all gone now." He turned to her and smiled. "I'm just delirious." His face turned serious. "Listen, Ronnie, I want to go out and paint today."

Veronica frowned. "You don't want to overdo it, Blain. Your eyes may not be completely adjusted yet, the dizziness might return."

"I won't go far. Look, across the plaza, that little church—I could set up in the shade of that tree next to it and paint the plaza and the hotel. You can look out from time to time to see that I'm all right." He put his hands on her shoulders and looked anxiously at her. "Ronnie, I'm dying to get a brush in my hands again."

"Go ahead then," she told him, "but you mustn't tire yourself. I'll walk over and get you when I think you've had enough."

"Good!" Blain hurried into the room to collect his equipment.

From the balcony, Veronica watched as he made his way across the plaza to a large tree that grew next to the steps of the church. He set his canvas on a low easel and

unfolded a camp stool before it. Sitting, he opened his palette case and began selecting tubes of oil that he could mix to match the colors of the scene before him. Veronica sighed contentedly and returned to the room.

Inside the church, a priest was listening to the words of a young woman with a tear-streaked face.

"I know the money came from him, Father," she said. "It could have come from no other. It was meant to take care of me after he is gone."

The priest looked down at the open package containing the ninety thousand pesos. "Perhaps the money did come from him, my child," he said quietly, "but even so, there is no reason why you should not keep it. He has been a great leader of our people for a long time; made many personal sacrifices in his efforts to overthrow the godless government we now have. If it puts his mind at rest to do this for one he has loved but had to sacrifice, then it is his right to do so."

"But I do not want the money, Father," she quietly pleaded. "I did not love him because he was a leader of the people, or because he was trying to rescue the country from slavery; I loved him for himself. For this I cannot take money."

The priest sighed heavily. In all the wisdom of the church, there still was no logic to cope with the emotions of youth. "Where will you go," he asked the young woman, "when this day is over?"

"I do not know, Father. I only know that I will go far away and never return."

The priest nodded. "Leave the money then, if you will not have it. I will see that it is put to good use, in the hands of the poor."

"Thank you, Father."

"Try to find peace, my child," he counselled.

"I will try, Father. Goodbye."

The young woman left the sanctuary and paused at the top of the outside steps. She looked around the plaza and then up at the sky. The sun had nearly reached its summit. *Soon it will be over*, she thought.

She walked down the steps, and when she reached the bottom happened to glance at a young man painting beneath a tree. The young man paused in his work and looked back at her.

Their eyes met and locked.

Veronica opened the door at the first knock and found a boy standing there with a note in his hand. She opened it and read:

Ronnie,

I cannot explain why I am doing this. I met a girl on the steps of the church. When I looked at her, I saw a sunbrowned madonna with the whole world for her halo. She is going far away, and I am going with her.

I shall never forget your kindness. Forgive me for not saying goodbye properly.

Your grateful friend,

Blain

Veronica hurried to the balcony and looked across the plaza. She saw only the church and the tree; Blain was gone.

Walking back into the room, she sank slowly into a chair. The boy who had brought the note still stood at the door.

"Is there anything else, Senora?" he asked.

Veronica shook her head slowly. "No. No, there is nothing else."

The boy closed the door, and Veronica was alone.



One who seeks relief from insolation should be conscious of the overshadowing danger of his alleviative.



few seconds with it like an eagle looking over a field mouse, and handed it back.

"I guess I was a little over the

Intervention

by Jerry Jacobson

I was moving along at a nice clip on the Barkley Freeway when I saw the flashing, bright red light in my rear-view mirror. At first I thought it was the sun because it was late afternoon and the reddish orange ball was low in the western sky. But the sun doesn't come with a siren.

When the patrolman leaned into my window, I already had my driver's license out. He took it, spent a

limit," I said. "I live about eight miles away, on Chester Avenue. I was trying to beat the rush-hour traffic before it hit the freeway three miles north, where they have the aircraft factory."

I had a feeling the officer wasn't hanging on my every word. His eyes roamed around the inside of my car, like eyes in search of something; something specific.

"How long you been driving the

Barkley Freeway?" he inquired.

"Ten years, anyway," I said. "Ever since they put it in."

"No, I mean how long today? You just pull on?"

"Oh, no," I said politely. "I got on at the Dover Avenue entrance about ten miles back." I gave him a law-abiding, wishy-washy look. "I hope I haven't broken any law. It would ruin a perfect record of ten years without a citation."

The patrolman took that into silent consideration and then examined the outside of my car. "Dark blue sedan."

"That's right," I said. "Dark blue. It's what they call Midnight

Blue, I think. Almost a blue-black."

He returned his eyes to the inside of the car for another inspection, while the radio hummed with soothing music to fight rush-hour traffic by. "Had your radio on all the time?"

"You mean the Newsalert Bulletin?" I asked. "Yes, I heard it. Something about the Eastgate First Trust Bank being held up, wasn't it? Terrible. Quick-buck schemers, something-for-nothing dreamers—lawlessness. Lot of that going around lately."

He was staring at the dashboard. "Open your glove compartment a second?"

"Sure thing, officer." I leaned across the seat, hit the button on the small door, and it snapped open. Inside were road maps, keys, rubber bands from somewhere, loose nickles for parking meters, lint from neglect. The usualness of my glove compartment made me feel almost saintly.

"Mind if I check under the seats?"

"No. Be my guest."

He made a thorough examination front and back, then got out and closed the door. "I don't want to cause you any alarm, Mr.—Havermeyer? That right?"

"Yes," I said. "Havermeyer."

"Well, I don't want to cause you any alarm, Mr. Havermeyer, but



your car happens to be the same color and make as the one used in the robbery of the Eastgate Trust."

"No alarm," I said. "Dark colored sedans are common here in California."

"No one was able to get a good look at the driver or copy down his license plate number, but two witnesses were able to identify the getaway car as a dark blue sedan. Just where did you say you'd been driving this afternoon, Mr. Havermeyer?"

"Well, I work at Reynar Paperbox about twelve miles south of here. I got off work there about thirty-five minutes ago."

"And what about the directions? In which directions have you been driving?"

"Why, north, of course," I told him. "If you live to the north and work in the south—you drive north to get back home."

"I imagine you got off the freeway, though, to shop or something. That right?"

I shook my head. "Straight as an arrow. I've made it a point never to deviate from a destination unless it's a matter of life or death. Home to work, work to home, six days a week. I lead a very ordered life."

"I just want to get this straight, Mr. Havermeyer," the officer said slowly. "After getting off work at

the Reynar Paperbox Company, you drove directly onto the north-bound freeway?"

"Directly," I said.

"And from there to where we are now, you stayed on it all the way? You didn't drive east to the Eastgate Trust Bank, and you didn't drive away from it, west, back onto the freeway?"

"How could I when I never left it?" I said. "Officer, no disrespect meant, but you haven't been listening closely to me at all."

"Then you never left the freeway," he said.

"Never."

I was truly amazed at the speed with which he jerked out that pistol, though I still had my doubts about the speed of his mind.

"You're under arrest for questioning, Mr. Havermeyer," he said icily. "Place both of your hands high on the steering column and do not move."

I did as I was told and smiled up at the bulldog face.

"Questioning?" I said. "In connection with what, officer?"

"The robbery of the Eastgate First Trust Bank."

"You're making a big mistake, officer. Besides lawlessness, there've been a lot of false arrest suits going around lately. You wouldn't want your name dragged through something like that, would you?"

He stepped back from the door. "Mr. Havermeyer, please come out of the car with both hands placed on top of your head."

"I suppose we're going back to have a look in the trunk," I said, as he opened the door for me to slip out. "I seriously submit you call this whole thing off."

With the pistol in my ribs, we walked back to the rear of the car. At his command I leaned down and opened the trunk, exposing a spare tire, a tire jack and iron, and a half-dozen manufactured logs, fireplace mood stuff. "You see? Nothing."

"Close the trunk, Mr. Havermeyer, then spread your legs and place

your palms right on the trunk lid."

I did this and was thoroughly searched. There was a hum of interest behind me.

"What's this, Mr. Havermeyer?"

"That?" I said, swallowing with some difficulty. "Why, it's a roll of electrician's tape, of course. For those little emergencies that occur around the home."

"How about for taping money to the underside of a car?" he said.

"Preposterous."

He took me back to the front of the car and handcuffed me to the steering column. I sat on the floor of the car and listened to the soothing music being interrupted by a Hollywood-type newscaster. "News-alert! Newsalert! This is your roving reporter, Sid Spangler, coming to you from Eastgate, the scene of the spectacular First Trust Bank robbery, and more news on the pursuit of the Daylight Bandit!"

I laughed. Here in California, they make up a 'hip' name for everything.

"... Eastgate police moved into action with lightning speed and Eastgate Police Chief Warren Milner promises a swift apprehension. In an EX-clusive KIDT interview moments ago, Chief Milner summed up the chilling situation with three words. 'We'll get him!' Stay tuned to KIDT for further details. Now back to the Swingin'



Summerfest of Sound for Hippy Motorists Homeward Bound! Numbah twenty-six on the swingin' KIDT Top Five Hundred—The Dirty Old Men and One Shaggy Mover singin' *Oh, But I Do Love My Armenian Bohemian!*"

I shuddered at the profusion of noisy instruments and mumbling voices coming from the radio, wondering just how bad Number Five Hundred was, when the patrolman returned.

He dropped the packets of money with tails of black electrician's tape at my feet. "Havermeyer, this looks pretty bad for you."

"I never saw that money before in my entire life."

"It was taped to the underside of the car, Havermeyer. I have to warn you that anything you say now will be used in evidence against you."

"Someone's playing an awfully dirty trick on me," I said. "I never left the freeway. I've never been in Eastgate in my life, and I was driving directly home. I told you that."

"And I would have believed you, too, Havermeyer," the officer said,

"except for just one little thing." "One little thing," I huffed, being difficult. "What one little thing?"

"Look above your steering wheel toward the ceiling and tell me what you see," he said.

I looked and rattled off what I saw: windshield, tinted glass, good-luck charm pinned to the leather above the windshield, sun visor—

"What am I supposed to be looking for?" I asked. "Can you give me a hint?"

"In what position is your sun visor, Mr. Havermeyer?"

"Why, in the down position, of course," I said with speedy confidence. "How do you expect a motorist to see anything with the sun staring him right in the—"

The officer smiled politely. "Excuse me, Mr. Havermeyer. I have to leave you a moment to call in. I won't be long. Oh—I left one of your hands free so you can shade your eyes from the sun. It's murder today."

"You're telling me?" I said. "You're telling me?"



When an able seaman recognizes that a ship is foundering, can he do aught but hasten to render assistance?

ONE Sleepless NIGHT

I ALWAYS felt Uncle Calvin was murdered—the perfect crime because there was no motive, no weapon, no opportunity. There was a method, but no plan. The poor old guy was simply nagged to death. It was a long illness, you might say, and he suffered a great deal from boredom toward the end.

His murderer was the conventional little gray-haired old lady with a penchant for black dresses and a bit of lace here and there. However, this one also had a flair for lousing up a normal life with a touch of sadism. For instance, after my uncle's death Aunt Amanda invited me to move in with her, pointing out she couldn't keep up her big gingerbread house by herself. Poor helpless spider throws



open web to young, healthy fly. Indigent nephew, orphan, sole heir to aunt's modest fortune, turns down aforesaid bereaved, widowed

... aunt? He could ignore her plea?

After I moved in with Aunt Amanda I continued to work at the bank. I needed the eight hours to rest up for my evening chores, and it was the only place where I ever saw any money. Besides, it kept me in touch with reality, made me feel I was living a normal life.

Now I realize that murder is not usually part of a normal life, and it's more my line to help old ladies across the street rather than into eternity, but after a year of nagging I could feel that deadly boredom spreading through my system. I recognized the symptoms because I had been fond of Uncle Calvin.

I decided to kill her on Saturday afternoon after I had raked and mowed the lawn. It was a big lawn with a row of elm trees along, that's right, Elm Street. I was hot and tired and I wanted a shower and a rest before supper because I hoped to get out of the web for a date that evening.

Dr. Bartlett was in the parlor with Aunt Amanda when I sneaked into the hall and started up the stairs, but my aunt's hearing matches her 20/20 vision.

"David," she called, "come in and say hello to Doc Bartlett."

I moved my aching muscles into the parlor, a room which reflected the last century from antimacassars

to a stuffed zibet. I lifted a heavy hand and said, "Hi, Doctor." He hated to be called Doc, as my aunt well knew.

"Hello, Dave," he said. That was all the conversation that was expected of us.

"Doc Bartlett says I'll live to be a hundred, David," my aunt remarked, knowing that some twenty-five years more of that lawn was not my fondest dream. "But he can't cure my cold, and he still doesn't know why I can't get a wink of sleep at night. Do you suppose the young doctor might know, Doc?"

Dr. Bartlett shrugged at this empty threat because she'd demanded special rates from him thirty years ago and wouldn't have changed doctors if her life depended on it. "Take more of those sleeping pills if one doesn't work," he said.

"Your mind is too active, Aunt Amanda," I put in. "You ought to get out more, see more people. Maybe even sell the house and take an apartment in Boston."

"You get more like your Uncle Calvin every day!" The way she said it didn't sound like a compliment somehow. "I've lived here in this house fifty years and I intend to die in it." No point arguing with Aunt Amanda. "The trouble with you young people, you have no

roots. It'll all be yours one day, David; what's wrong with it?"

Well, nothing that a coat of paint and new shingles wouldn't fix, but I could put that off till spring. The next thing to worry about would be putting up storm windows. Then I could concentrate on the furnace and the plumbing and indoor jobs. There was really nothing wrong with the house that three handymen couldn't fix.

"You look as tired as I feel, Dave," Dr. Bartlett said, breaking in on my rootless dream. "Sort of peaked."

"Peaked! He's eating me out of house and home. Go make us some tea, David. You'll stay, Doc?"

"Can't." The doctor got heavily to his feet. "Rest is the thing for your cold, Amanda. You catch up on your sleep and you'll be fit as a fiddle." He winked at me as we went out into the hall.

"See if Calvin wants to join us, David," my aunt called after us.

The doctor looked startled; then he grinned. "It always gives me a start," he said. "Does she really believe it?"

"Why not? She's eccentric enough."

"Well, I'm a Methodist myself, but I suppose *that* might seem eccentric to a Hindu. Has she got enough pills on hand?"

"Nearly a whole bottle."

"That ought to be enough for a good long sleep." It was my turn to look startled, but Dr. Bartlett winked at me with a straight face as he opened the front door. There was no wink in his voice when he added, "Calvin was a good friend of mine. Tell him it would be okay with me."

Uncle Calvin, a big black cat with flecks of rust in his fur and absolutely orange eyes, was in the kitchen, curled up beside his bowl of milk. I didn't pay him any attention because I was trying to figure out what the doctor had meant, but when I moved the pot of baked beans to the back of the stove and lit the burner under the tea kettle he came over and rubbed against my ankle.

"Would you care to join us for tea?" I asked sarcastically. Uncle Calvin—it just didn't seem right to call him Calvin—didn't say a word. I didn't expect him to; just a stupid, spoiled old cat.

Well, not so old as cats go. He was only a kitten when he wandered in a few days after Uncle Calvin's funeral. It was too much for Aunt Amanda's logical mind. Not that she ever mentioned the word reincarnation, but you get the idea. It never occurred to her that this house was the last place Uncle Calvin would transmigrate to. Anyway, the cat paid for his comforts

by leading a dog's life. Just like Uncle Calvin and me, now that I think of it.

I got the cooking sherry down from the cupboard and put a slug in his milk. I had discovered he liked it when I once sneaked a quick one for myself. But right now a beer would have hit the spot, and I seemed to remember a quaint custom from my other life called the cocktail hour. I've got nothing against tea, but was I fed up with that old crumpet!

I washed my hands and face at the sink while the cat lapped up his sherry flip. I cut the bread and got out the jam and poured the boiling water into the teapot Uncle Calvin had brought back from China. When I carried the tray into the parlor Aunt Amanda was standing at the window.

"The lawn looks ragged, David," she said. "You'd better sharpen the mower tomorrow and do it again. And the hedge needs clipping."

"It's late in the year for—"

"Now, now, no excuses, dear. If a thing's worth doing it's worth doing well. This tea looks awfully weak to me."

"Just give it a little time to—"

"Wasn't there any strawberry jam?"

"I couldn't find any. Where's Ellen? She wasn't—"

"I let her go. She said she didn't want to work here anymore, so I fired her. You'll have to get me a new maid Monday. We'll make out tonight with the baked beans and brown bread, and you can treat me to dinner out tomorrow." She gave me a cup of tea and a sly look. "I really ought to get out more, and see more people."

I had planned to spend Sunday with Sally Payson; that is, what was left of it when Aunt Amanda got through with me. I wondered what Sally would say if I invited her to join my aunt and me for dinner tomorrow. She seldom used profanity, but we'd been engaged a year and her patience had been sorely tried, to put it mildly.

My aunt could follow a train of thought as well as the next one, although she liked to claim it was extrasensory perception. "Now don't look like that, David," she said. "You'll be seeing Sally tonight. Of course without Ellen in the house I can't be left alone, but you bring her over here and we'll have a nice game of cribbage."

"Three handed?" I asked. This was really too much!

"Well, whatever you say then. What does Sally like to play?"

"Post office," I said.

"I don't think that's very funny, David," she said. "I've never put up with loose living or loose talk



DEAC

—” She broke off, looking at my feet. “Oh, there you are,” she said primly.

Uncle Calvin was sitting there, washing his whiskers with his paw. “David must have given you your milk,” she said. “You look like the cat who swallowed the canary.”

“Every drop,” I said, scratching his ears.

“Don’t do that; he doesn’t like it.” Aunt Amanda may have known her husband, but she didn’t know cats. “Come here, Calvin, come here,” she ordered in a gentle, threatening voice. The cat got up and stretched, his front paws stuck out, his rear end high. I couldn’t help grinning.

“Stubborn,” muttered Aunt Amanda. “Just plain cussed. What’s so funny, David?”

So help me, I was thinking the cat was afraid she’d smell his breath. “He’s tired,” I needled, picking him up. “He got out again last night. I think Uncle Calvin’s got a girl friend.”

“We’ll put an end to that! I want you to build a little runway in the back yard tomorrow.”

The cat jumped off my lap and walked out of the room.

“I never knew Dr. Bartlett was an old friend of Uncle Calvin’s,” I said out of a clear sky. My aunt was staring smugly after the cat

and looked puzzled for a second.

“Oh. You mean . . . Why yes, in the old days. They shipped out together, all over the world.”

“Before you were married?”

“Of course. Afterwards, your uncle settled down and built up his import business.”

“I’ll bet you were a big help, Aunt Amanda.”

“Well, it took a bit of doing. Calvin was restless, inclined to enjoy life too much. So was Doc. I might say I steadied them both down.”

“I’ll bet Dr. Bartlett was jealous when Uncle Calvin retired?”

“Jealous! He had the nerve to say it would kill him!” She looked at the door and lowered her voice. “I had quite a time on my hands, persuading your uncle; the monotony, he said. My goodness, there was always plenty for Calvin to do around the house.”

“You were quite right,” I said sincerely.

“A man can drive himself *too* hard. Look at Doc now. I’d die of neglect if I didn’t keep after him.”

That wasn’t exactly what she was going to die of, but it was useless to disagree with Aunt Amanda. What was the point of telling her the doctor had thoughtfully prescribed a good long sleep, courtesy of himself and Uncle Calvin. He’d even checked to make

sure I had enough sleeping pills. A hard-headed, no-nonsense man like Dr. Bartlett didn't leave his dirty work to an incipient tomcat. I had my orders, and if I hadn't read them right it was criminal carelessness on his part, telling Aunt Amanda in front of a witness to take *more* pills.

I managed a shower before fixing supper, and counted all those colorful little capsules to make sure the druggist hadn't stuffed too much cotton in the bottle. I left Aunt Amanda getting out the cribbage board at eight; she knew I wouldn't be gone very long.

It came as no surprise when Sally turned down a pleasant evening with my aunt and me. She had on a new dress, filled out enticingly, more suitable for dancing than cribbage. But I must say I didn't like the way her blue eyes sparkled when she said I was as nutty as my aunt—or the way her little nose turned up when she broke our engagement.

I explained I had a certain duty toward Aunt Amanda's money, my eventual freedom and Sally's own happiness; to no avail. I even pleaded that my poor old aunt was ill, didn't have long to live, but Sally only sneered, and I was in no position to explain I had to hurry home and mix the lethal dose.

I must say my aunt took the

news of my broken engagement very well. "Inconsiderate, just like her mother," she said, "to begrudge an old woman an evening with her nephew."

"Well," I said, "I'll find a nice girl someday who'll be willing to move in here and do the housework."

My aunt looked at me suspiciously. "I must say you're taking this very well, David," she said as she cut the cards. "A year ago it was Sally this and Sally that."

"We've grown apart since then. Your deal, Aunt Amanda."

Is there anything more pleasant than a friendly game on a chilly night with a big black cat curled up before a crackling fire? Yes, there is! I lost seven games in a row because my mind was elsewhere. My aunt was disgusted with me.

"You're very dull tonight, David," she finally said. "Thank heavens there's a good murder at ten!" I must have looked very dull indeed. "Channel Four," she said impatiently. "You know the program."

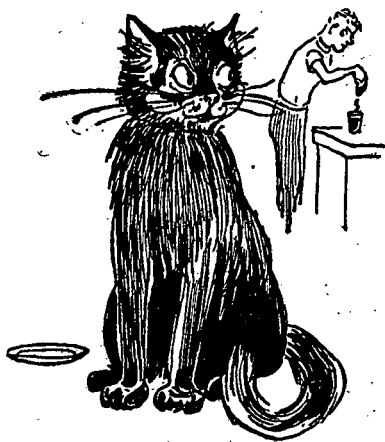
I turned on the set. It was the opening commercial, and the logical time to go to the bathroom. I excused myself, went upstairs, and got the sleeping pills out of the medicine chest. When I turned on the light in the kitchen I stumbled

over Uncle Calvin. "Go on, beat it," I said. "Curl up by the fire and mind your own business." I admit I was a bit self-conscious about what I was going to do.

One of Aunt Amanda's favorite TV drinks was a concoction of tomato juice laced with a squeeze of lemon, salt and pepper, and plenty of Worcestershire sauce. I figured it would dissolve most anything, including the roof of your mouth, and leave no taste. I mixed the drink and began breaking the capsules into it, like tiny eggs. I was just beginning to get the hang of it when I felt someone watching me. I could feel the hairs on the back of my neck stiffen, but when I turned around there was no one there except Uncle Calvin.

I know it would be more dramatic to say he was watching me with approval or disapproval but, as a matter of fact, he was just staring at me stupidly with his big orange eyes. Still, he made me nervous. I picked him up and opened the back door, but it was beginning to rain and he squirmed so frantically that I didn't have the heart to put him out. He stayed with me while I emptied every last capsule into the drink and stirred it until my arm was tired. Then I washed the capsules down the sink and we went back into the parlor.

"He'll never get away with it,"



my aunt was saying to the television set. "You have to plan a murder. You can't leave anything to chance. The man's a bungler. Where've you been, David?"

"I brought you your drink, Aunt Amanda."

"Tomato juice? All I want tonight is a little warm milk. My throat is sore."

"But—"

"You should have asked me. Well, what's done is done. No point wasting it."

I breathed a sigh of relief.

"You drink it," she said.

As I've pointed out, my aunt was no person to argue with. Suddenly the room seemed very hot even

though I noticed the fire had burned down. Uncle Calvin had planked himself in front of it, and all of a sudden he began to wash his whiskers with his paw.

"I'm sorry," I said, "but I gave Uncle Calvin the last of the milk."

"You might have the same consideration for me that you do for him," my aunt said irritably. "All right. I'll drink it, but I won't like it, David. Please bring me some crackers."

In the kitchen I mopped my brow and reflected that murder isn't as easy as you might think, especially when you've had no experience, and particularly when your victim is someone as stubborn and contrary as Aunt Amanda. Sure enough, when I brought her the crackers she'd taken only one little ladylike sip.

"Too much Worcestershire, David," she said. "I just can't trust you to do anything right."

The last ten minutes of that program must have been done in slow motion. I don't recall what it was about except I got the uncomfortable impression that murder will out. The delicate way my aunt pointed her pinky as she sipped and sipped nearly drove me crazy. She'd have gotten a great deal of pleasure if she'd known how she was torturing me. At ten-thirty she snapped off the set and stifled a

yawn, slowly rose and stretched.

"Tired?" I asked eagerly.

"Good heavens, no!" she said. "I'll be lucky if I get a wink of sleep tonight. But it might help if I go to bed and read awhile."

"Good idea," I said, considering that's where the body should logically be found.

As she went into the hall she said, "Don't forget to bring me my sleeping pills and a glass of water, David."

I could have kicked myself. There were no more sleeping pills. I'd used every last one of them in her Bloodless Mary and washed the capsules down the sink. To make it worse, it was a nightly ritual to take her a couple of pills and a glass of water, and I should have anticipated it. I just wasn't cut out to be an efficient murderer.

The moment of panic passed as quickly as it had come. What did it really matter? She'd finished the drink and it was just a matter of time. Five minutes or fifteen, all I had to do was wait.

I went into the kitchen and took a big slug of sherry. Uncle Calvin tagged along and I gave him the saucer of milk I'd lied about and put a little sherry in it. Strangely enough he refused to touch it.

After a while I went upstairs and listened outside Aunt Amanda's door. There wasn't a sound. I put

my ear to the door and counted to a hundred: no cough, no snuffle, no sound of bedsprings, nothing. I opened the door very quietly.

My aunt lay back on propped-up pillows, her eyes closed, a book on her lap. In the light of the bed lamp her face looked very old—and peaceful. It must have been painless, I thought. I moved across the room to make sure, and at that moment Uncle Calvin bounded in and jumped up on her bed. Aunt Amanda came to with a start.

"Well! I must say it's about time!" she said sharply.

"But—" I said stupidly.

"I heard you come in. Don't think I didn't."

Who did she think she was kidding! She'd dropped off to sleep, or maybe it was the first sign of a coma. Anyway, I was startled and angry.

"Where are my sleeping pills?" she demanded.

All right. I'll tell you where they are, I thought, you nagging old witch. There's nothing you can do now. It will be a pleasure to tell you.

"There aren't any," I said. "You've taken your last sleeping pill!"

"Don't tell me what I can do or can't do," she yelled, sitting up in bed. "I know what you think, young man! I've seen it in your

face every night. You don't think I need those pills. What do you mean, there aren't any! Didn't Doc leave a new supply?"

"No," I said.

"So you and Doc are in this together! I might have known it. I don't care if you think you're doing it for my own good or not. I can't sleep without my pills! I feel terrible right this minute."

Well, it was about time.

"Give me my bathrobe and go to bed, David. I'm very displeased with you."

Habit being what it is, I went to my room and closed the door. Then I waited. Sure enough, in a minute or so I heard her moving along the hall. *She's going to the bathroom, I thought. She feels terrible and she thinks a little bicarbonate of soda will do the trick.* But then I heard her voice. It seemed to come from downstairs, and it wasn't the voice she used to talk to herself. What the devil was she up to now!

I went quietly to the head of the stairs and looked down. The hall light was on and Aunt Amanda sat at the little table where the telephone was. She was sort of doubled up, and her voice sounded strange.

"I know it's late, Doc," she was saying, "but you know I wouldn't bother you if it wasn't important.



every false tooth in her head. I couldn't believe my eyes, but the way she tripped up the stairs left no doubt. Why had she tricked the doctor into coming to see her?

"Oh, still up, David?" she chor-tled. "Let Doc in when he arrives. He's coming over to give me a sedative, even if he doesn't know it. Think you can keep my sleep-ing pills from me, eh?"

I didn't answer. What was there to say? The old dame was harder to kill than Rasputin. Would Dr. Bartlett overlook the way I'd bungled the job? Would he go along with my story that Aunt Amanda had taken an overdose of sleeping pills? I felt a bit sick myself.

In a daze I noticed that Uncle Calvin was at the foot of the stairs looking up at me. When he caught my eye he went to the front door and said, "Meow." I went down to let him out, but it was still raining. "You don't want to go out now," I said, but he whisked out as I was speaking. Well, a date is a date. I closed the door, then went to my room and lay down on the bed.

At first I thought I was dream-ing when I heard him yowling. Uncle Calvin, I mean. I considered going down to let him in, but he continued with such ardor and passion I knew that wasn't what he wanted. Finally I got up and opened the window, tempted to

Oh, is that so? Well, you listen to me! I feel like I'm going to die, and if you don't get over here as fast as you can it'll be on your conscience—if you have one!" Then she slammed the receiver down.

Why did Aunt Amanda always have to complicate the simplest thing! If she still were conscious when the doctor arrived he'd have to rush her to the hospital and pump her out. It was one thing to wink at murder and quite another to commit one. I'd bungled it all right—unless my aunt died before he got here.

Even as these thoughts raced through my mind, Aunt Amanda straightened up and grinned with

throw something at him. But that fool cat was out of range, yowling under Aunt Amanda's window, of all places.

At that moment I heard my aunt calling my name. The whole thing had a nightmare quality; the cat yowling, my aunt calling frantically, the rain falling outside. I willed myself not to move. It was out of my hands now. *The death watch with sound effects*, I thought crazily.

Then the front door opened and the corpse rushed out into the rain screaming, "Calvin! You come back here, you dirty old thing! Calvin, do you hear me!"

I leaned out the window just as she reached Uncle Calvin. As she bent down to grab him, the cat darted out of reach. I could just about make them out in the dark. Uncle Calvin didn't run away, he simply moved out of reach. Aunt Amanda made another lunge at him, and missed again. This time he sauntered into the path of light from the open door and sat down. I could see the wild look on my aunt's face as she tried to circle around in back of him. But Uncle Calvin was ready. This time he slipped out of her wet grasp and led her closer to the house. I leaned farther out of the window just as the headlights from Dr. Bartlett's car swept the lawn and my aunt

fell, kerplop, flat on her old face.

I closed the window and dried my damp hair with my handkerchief. Then I went downstairs, in time to see Uncle Calvin slip in and make for the parlor and the glowing embers in the fireplace, just ahead of Dr. Bartlett carrying my aunt in his arms. She was very wet and very unconscious.

"What happened?" I asked innocently.

"Your aunt's had a bad fall. Struck her head on a rock. Help me get her up to her room, David."

"I thought she was in bed! What was she doing out in the rain?"

"Chasing that fool cat. She tripped over the lawnmower."

"Will I catch hell!" I said without thinking. "Leaving the lawnmower out in the rain."

"Snap out of it, David," Dr. Bartlett said. "This is serious. Bring me some extra blankets."

Later I heated the coffee while he called the hospital. I listened from the kitchen, but he didn't say anything about my aunt being loaded with sleeping pills. Yet he must have known. My hand shook when I handed him his cup.

"Don't take it so hard, David," he said. "It wasn't your fault. There's a concussion; maybe mild, maybe not. Anyway I don't want to move her. You let the nurse

take over and you relax. You always spoiled the old lady rotten. But what the hell was she doing, chasing a cat in the rain, at her age, and with a cold!"

"I was in my room; I didn't hear her go out. But she was jealous of Uncle Calvin. She thought he had a girlfriend."

"You sure you feel all right, son?" Dr. Bartlett asked.

I realized that did sound kind of silly. I decided I'd never feel easy until I knew where Dr. Bartlett stood when Aunt Amanda died.

"Well," I said cautiously, "she may have taken more of those sleeping pills . . . like you told her to. Perhaps she was wandering around in a daze."

"She could have taken the whole bottle without ill effects," he said. "They're perfectly harmless."

"What do you mean, Doctor?"

"You don't think I'd waste bona fide drugs on Amanda, do you? Come off it, David! You know as well as I do your aunt never lost a night's sleep in her life."

Aunt Amanda died two days later; pneumonia complicated by a

mild concussion. Sally came back to the house with me after the funeral. I must say she was a great comfort in my grief.

"We'll live here for a while, darling," she said, "if that's the way you want it."

"Too many memories," I said. "We'll sell the place and buy something smaller."

Just then Uncle Calvin sauntered into the parlor. I crouched down and scratched his ears. "Let's all have a glass of sherry," I said. "How about it, Uncle Calvin?" He began to purr. Sally was looking at me strangely.

"Do you really think he understands you, David?" she asked.

"Only too well," I said. "Some of my best friends are cats."

Sally giggled. "And I suppose if some female kitten wanders in here tomorrow you'll name it Aunt Amanda."

"Oh, cut it out, Sally," I said. "I'm only saying that this cat will have a home with us as long as he lives."

But Uncle Calvin ran away that night and I never saw him again.



It is small consolation to some that certain creations of man are more transitory than man himself.

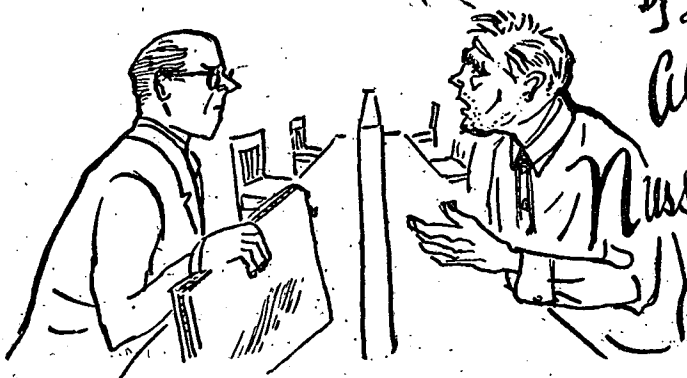
I WANT something understood between us," Ellis said. "You can tell the whole truth or tell nothing, but *don't* lie. Only a fool lies to his attorney. Is that clear?"

"Yeah, sure, I know that. I been around." Magee licked his lips and

looked across the room. The guard was at the door, so he couldn't be overheard. "Well," he began and rubbed the gray stubble on his chin. "I guess you'd say it started when Paul Fain an' I knocked over the Second National . . ."

VIEWPOINT

By
Al
Nussbaum



Magee pulled the black sedan into traffic with screaming tires, glanced at the rearview mirror, then made a sharp turn. There was no pursuit, but he could hear the sound of approaching sirens. Perspiration was making his shirt stick to his back. "Gonna have a change of plans, kid. You stick with this car an' I'll follow in mine. They'll be lookin' for two guys in one car." He slammed to a stop near a red convertible, and jumped out.

Paul Fain slid behind the wheel and put the sedan in motion. Magee, driving the convertible, caught up with him before he'd traveled a mile. At Tijuana, the Mexican customs officer waved Paul's lead car through the barricade, but Magee was asked to stop at the customs house. He saw Paul slow down, look back, then pick up speed and disappear from view. After filling out a routine tourist questionnaire, Magee was free to continue, but Paul was nowhere in sight.

They had made no provision for becoming separated, and Magee could only hope that Paul would return to the border. He decided to wait for him on the American side where he could keep the customs station in sight.

He slouched behind the wheel and listened to the radio. A news

broadcast told of a \$214,000 robbery at the Second National Bank in Los Angeles. Magee pounded the wheel with his fist and swore. Their first bank job, and Paul had run out on him with the loot. For all the good it did him, it might just as well have been another gas station or supermarket.

Magee saw a couple of cowboy actors he recognized come across the border in a long convertible with beautiful women at their sides. He swore again. He and Paul should have been safely installed in one of the hotels along the beach with a couple of senoritas; instead, he sat sweating and breathing exhaust fumes while waiting for that damn kid. Where could he have gone?

Magee stared angrily at the rows of traffic coming from the Mexican side; then sat straighter as a black sedan approached the U.S. Customs. He saw two officers join the regular man at the traffic lane. One man snatched open the driver's door and the other pulled Paul from the car. Magee started his engine. He didn't want any part of this. No sense in both of them getting busted when the money was lost.

He spent a fitful night at a secluded motel and bought a newspaper in the morning. To his surprise, the police were still looking

for unknown bandits who had held up the Second National. On an inside page, he read that a young car thief named Paul Fain had been arrested at the Mexican border.

Of course! The owner of the sedan had reported it stolen. Paul had been driving it for hours instead of the ten minutes originally planned. Now Paul was in jail for swiping it, but where was the money? If it had been in the car, it would have been mentioned. What had he done with it?

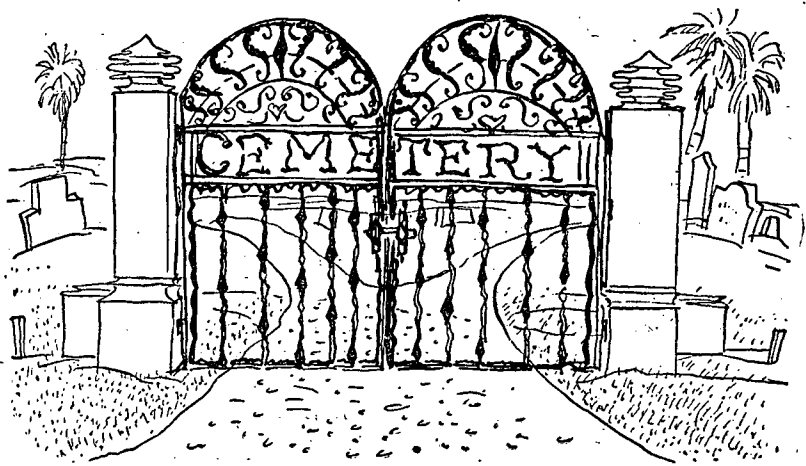
Paul received a prison sentence, and his two years in prison was as binding on Magee as it was on him. Magee didn't dare do anything that might cause him to serve a jail term, too; he might miss the big payoff. He sold his car and later, when the money ran

out, found a job as a short-order cook in a restaurant.

Magee picked up Paul, when he was released, in a rented car, and Paul told him what had happened two years earlier: "When I saw you get stopped, I thought you'd been busted. I figured I had to hide the money in case I got arrested too, so I drove south till it started to get dark, made a left turn away from the ocean, and followed a dirt road till I came to a graveyard. I dug a deep hole and put the duffel bag in it."

"Sure you can find the place again?" Magee asked.

"I'll find it. It's got a big, fancy iron gate in front and it was almost new. They didn't even have a fence all the way around it yet. At the sides and rear, there were clean, new stakes driven into the



soft ground to mark off the area."

They passed the border and continued south. Magee asked, "How far till we turn off?"

Paul looked anxiously about. "Slow down. I'm not sure. I don't recognize the road; they all look alike. We'll have to try them all till we find the right one."

"How far did you drive down the side road to reach the boneyard?"

"Just a couple of miles, I think, but we'd better drive three or four to be on the safe side," Paul suggested.

Three days and over thirty side roads later, they still hadn't found the cemetery. They were tired, red-eyed, sunburned, and short-tempered. The car had a broken spring and was covered with a fine yellow dust from the unpaved roads and trails.

"Kid," Magee said when they were back inside their motel room on the outskirts of Tijuana, "I think you're giving me a bunch of bunk. If there's a cemetery there, why haven't we found it?"

"I don't know," Paul said, shaking his crew cut head. "It doesn't make sense, unless—"

"Unless what?" Magee snapped.

"Unless the road I took isn't used anymore. Maybe we have to make a right or left turn from one of the side roads to reach the

cemetery. It's gotta be near here."

Magee sprawled wearily across the bed in his dusty clothes. "You mean we gotta go through all this again? The car won't take it. As it is, the rental agency's gonna have a fit when they see it."

"Maybe there's a shortcut we can use. There's a small airport down the road. Maybe we can hire a plane and pilot, and get all of our searching done in a few hours."

The next day they spent the last of their money to conduct an aerial search, but the results were the same—no cemetery.

"I can't understand it," Paul said. "I can remember that graveyard like I was there yesterday. The duffel is only a few feet from a little white marble headstone carved: PELON HERNANDEZ."

"Kid," Magee said coldly, "I don't believe there is any boneyard out there, but I'm gonna find out for sure." Magee slammed the door, leaving the room, and went to the motel office.

"*Buenas tardes, Senor,*" the overweight owner greeted him. "Can I help you?"

"Yeah, Mac. Got a problem. A friend asked me—ah—to visit a grave when he heard I was comin' down here. I'm lookin' for a cemetery with a big iron gate and white headstones so I can put

flowers on the grave of a guy named Pelon Hernandez."

The motel owner laughed pleasantly, causing his heavy cheeks to vibrate. "Your friend, he is playing a joke on you. We do not have a cemetery like that in all of Baja California. The people are too poor for iron gates and marble headstones. A headstone would cost more than some peons earn in a year. And the name 'Pelon' is no name for a grave. That is a—how you say—nickname. It means 'baldy'."

The attorney, Ellis, leaned forward and put his hands on the edge of the table that separated him from Magee. "Is that why you killed Paul Fain?"

"Yeah," Magee answered. "We come back to the states and I kept trying to get him to admit he was lying, but he wouldn't. When I was sure he was never gonna split with me, I shot him."

Ellis pursed his lips. "Why did you believe the motel owner and not your partner?"

"Cause the motel guy didn't have

a reason to lie, but Paul sure did."

"Perhaps you needed a new viewpoint. Did you consider that they *both* might have been telling the truth?"

Magee looked at him quizzically for a second and then blurted, "No! That's impossible!"

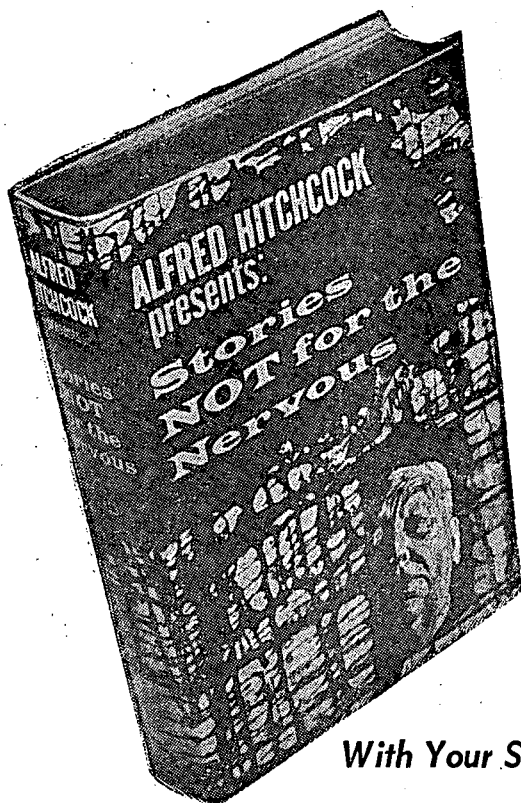
Ellis pushed his chair back and stood up, "I don't usually take charity cases, but I'll make an exception here. I'll do all I can, but don't expect miracles; and I'll consider the story you've told me payment for my services."

"That's okay with me," Magee agreed, getting to his feet and turning back toward the waiting guard.

Ellis stopped at the first pay phone he saw after leaving the jail. When his secretary answered, he ordered, "Call the Second National and see if they're still offering a reward for the return of the loot from the robbery two years ago. Then call the movie and TV studios and find out which one had a crew working south of Tijuana two years ago, and the exact location they used for a cemetery set."



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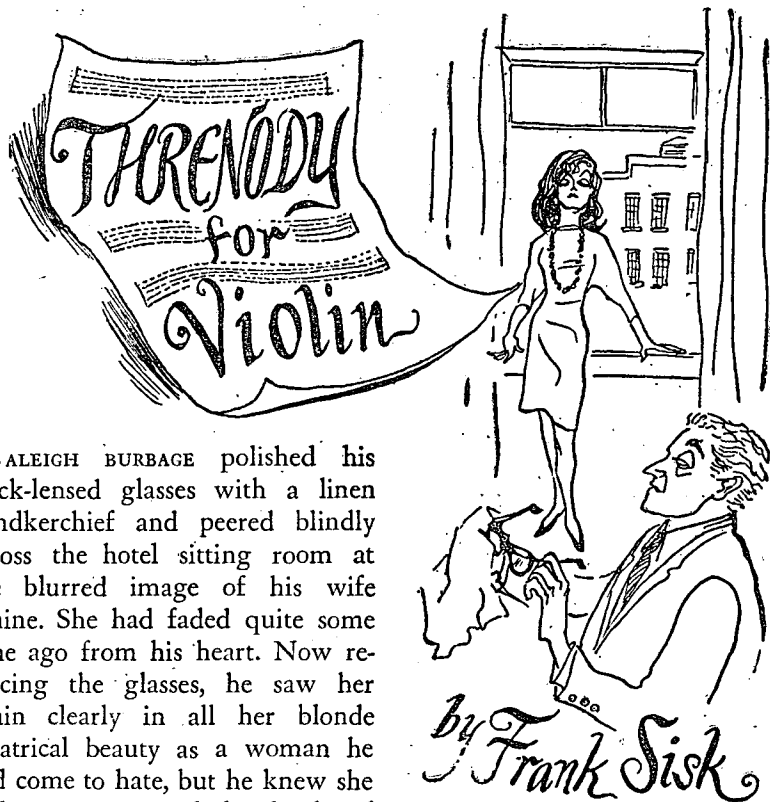
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The lamb that belonged to the sheep, whose skin the wolf was wearing, began to follow the wolf in the sheep's clothing, according to an old fable.



RALEIGH BURBAGE polished his thick-lensed glasses with a linen handkerchief and peered blindly across the hotel sitting room at the blurred image of his wife Elaine. She had faded quite some time ago from his heart. Now replacing the glasses, he saw her again clearly in all her blonde theatrical beauty as a woman he had come to hate, but he knew she had not yet guessed the depths of this strong feeling. Just as well.

"I'm glad you've finally decided to act like civilized people," she was saying. "I still find it pretty hard to swallow, though."

"The Burbage family's altruism has never been limited solely to money matters," the man replied with a wry smile. "In affairs of the heart we have often given

more than we've received. I think ours might be a case in point. Don't you agree?"

"I can get along without the sarcasm, Raleigh."

"It's just my unfortunate manner, Elaine. Beneath the veneer I'm as pliable as putty. If it takes Tonio to make you happy, then I'm ready to step aside."

"Yeah, but it's so unlike you. That's what makes me a teensy bit suspicious." She pondered the smoke writhing from her cigarette. "Why such a change of mind all of a sudden? A month ago you wouldn't budge an inch. Then, as of last night, everything has to be done at once if not sooner."

"It requires time to reach a sudden decision, my dear," Burbage answered imperturbably.

"Well, I suppose so." She got up from the chair and moved restlessly to the wide window that looked across the chasm of traffic at other windows. "But was my trip from Chicago, on practically a moment's notice, really necessary? I mean, my engagement there has only one more week to run. Couldn't the legalities, as you call them, have waited that much longer?" She turned away from the window. "Now I've got to fly back there late this afternoon and pray I don't miss my first entrance."

"My time is also of the essence," said Burbage with a trace of mockery.

"Sure, sure. Besides, you hold the high cards and, as usual, you're playing them close to your chest." She sauntered back to the chair and sat down. "Well, anyway, when I reached Tonio in Miami last night and told him about your reverse shift, he could hardly believe it."

"The proverbial Latin skeptic."

"He wanted to know if you had taken up drinking."

"These concert musicians run depressingly true to form. The only motivations they understand are love, hate and vino. I suppose he's coming up, though."

"Of course. He had a rehearsal first thing this morning but he managed to book a seat on that Eastern flight you suggested. He called back to tell me. It's due at Kennedy around one-thirty."

"One thirty-nine, to be exact. I've taken it often myself. At this time of year reservations are nearly not necessary. You're sure he knows where we're having our little conference?"

"The Hotel Saint Ambrose." Elaine raised her artfully plucked eyebrows. "This is the Hotel Saint Ambrose, isn't it?"

"Certainly. Why do you ask?"

"Well, the way you whisked me

through the lobby and into the elevator, I hardly noticed anything. Do you live here now when you're in New York?"

"Why, no. I've never stayed here before in my life."

Elaine lighted another cigarette. "What's the matter with the Waldorf nowadays? You blackballed there or something?"

"SRO for the next few days. United Nations delegates are holding Ladies Day there."

"Very funny."

Burbage smiled blandly but said nothing. Then, at a discreet knock on the door, he got nimbly to his feet and walked across the room.

It was a bellhop with a powder blue florist box tied with a ribbon of pink lace. "For Elaine Burbage," he said.

Burbage took the box and, half turning toward her, said in a burlesque of flirtatiousness, "Somebody out there loves you, honey."

"I can't imagine who." She was frankly surprised. "Nobody knows I'm here except Tonio and I don't think it would occur—"

"Shall I arrange them in a vase, sir?" asked the bellhop.

"I'll handle it, thanks." Burbage put a dollar in the bellhop's ready hand as a token of dismissal. When the door was closed he strolled across the room with that bland smile back on his face and pre-

sented the box to Elaine with a courtly little flourish. "You won't bet on Tonio?"

"It's not that. He often sends me flowers before a performance, but this hardly seems the time or place." She slid the ribbon the length of the box and removed the cover. The dewy red roses inside, as if inhaling, broke through the confining tissue. "They're lovely, no matter whose. Oh, here's a card."

"What's it say?" Burbage asked.

"To an irreplaceable wife from an indispensable husband." She tossed the card disdainfully back in the box. "Too cute for comment, Raleigh. What exactly are you up to?"

"A small gesture to the past. Nothing more."

"I'd like to believe it."

"Please do."

"But I can't." Suddenly an idea hit her hard. "Hey, wait a second." She hurried to the phone and spun the dial once. When the hotel operator answered she said, "This is suite ten-twenty. Just for tax purposes I'd like to know whose name it's registered in." She spent the ensuing pause glowering at her crimson fingernails. "I see, operator. Thanks." Wearily she cradled the receiver. "I might have known. Mister and Missus R. A. Burbage. This is your day for being real

cute, isn't it? Why did you do it?"

"It's not against the law," Burbage said amiably.

"Well, it's against my sense of decency."

"A sense recently acquired?"

"Oh, stow it, Raleigh. I don't know what your game is but I won't play it. Now or ever."

"Then accept the apologies of a poor sentimentalist."

"Oh boy!" She shrugged her shapely shoulders in a gesture of grandiloquent patience, then on second thought glanced at her wristwatch. "Why, it's nearly one o'clock."

"Shall I order luncheon?" Burbage asked.

"Skip it for now."

"You'd rather have —"

"I'd rather have a hot bath." She smiled in spite of herself. "You took the words right out of my mouth, practically. You're full of tricks today, aren't you?"

"No trick there. During our conubial years I observed you unflinchingly conclude all trips by plane, train, bus, car or boat with a plunge into a hot tub. Your fidelity in this regard, at least, I felt I could always count on."

She stared at him uncomprehendingly for a moment before seeming to get a glimmer of what he meant. "Well, bully for you, Four Eyes."

"That hurts," he said derisively.

"That really hurts."

"I only wish it was fatal," said Elaine. "Does the bedroom door lock from the inside?"

"Try it and see," said Burbage. "I'll wait out here if you don't mind."

For two minutes after the bedroom door slammed behind Elaine's angry back Burbage stood motionless, a cruel smile playing at the corners of his mouth. Then as if responding to an inaudible time signal he moved swiftly to the door which led to the hallway, opened it, carefully set the spring lock so that it wouldn't defy a key from outside, looked right and left and, satisfied with the emptiness, closed the door softly and hurried over the thick carpeting to the nearby bank of elevators.

The self-operated car that carried him down to the lobby was occupied by four women engaged in a partisan discussion of the relative genius of two hair stylists named Pierre and Constantine. The lobby was populated heavily, as usual at that time of day, with incoming and outgoing guests, porters and bellhops.

Unnoticed as he was unnoticed, Burbage rapidly wove his way toward the men's lounge outside the main dining room. It was large and archaic, as befitted the Hotel

Saint Ambrose, with white tile and black grout from stem to stern. Besides the customary facilities, it contained two features not ordinarily found in men's lounges of metropolitan hotels: a row of baggage lockers and three special compartments described on their brown wooden doors as "Private Washroom — Single Occupancy Only."

Burbage passed, ignored, by the sole users of the place—two men side by side drying their moist hands under hot-air dispensers and casting profane votes in favor of paper towels. He went to one of the private washrooms and actuated the steel lock with a quarter. Inside was the expected flush toilet whose porcelainized seat was held erect and partially recessed in a germ-killing concavity of ultraviolet, and a white globular sink surmounted by a shelf of some green plastic material and a mirror with its silvering gone at the edges. On a chrome rack screwed to the wall hung a hand towel and a shoe-shine flannel.

First, Burbage took the linen handkerchief from his breast pocket and spread it in a single fold on the plastic shelf. Next he removed his thick-lensed glasses. This gave the upper part of his face a strangely naked and defenseless appearance. He looked at him-

self in the mirror but all he could really see were the tints of flesh whose outlines merged wavily with a vague background of gray and white. For, with the family wealth, Raleigh Burbage had also inherited from the maternal side a tendency to near-blindness as time went on. Carefully folding the bows of his glasses, he set them on the handkerchief. This he folded with equal care and then slipped the protective package back into his breast pocket.

He produced from a side pocket what looked like a black velvet card case. With practiced touch he extracted from this case a fragile-looking lens no larger than a child's fingernail. Moistening a thumb with water, he deftly applied the lens to the cornea of his right eye. He then made a similar application to his left eye.

Stepping back a pace, he blinked thrice. The contacts felt perfect, almost as if they weren't there at all. Nobody could ever know how many hours of pain and frustration it had required to achieve this end. Three months divided into progressively longer periods of lonely experiment that began with that first, barely endurable five minutes.

But as he gazed now at the clearly visible image in the mirror he knew the suffering had been worth it. Without the glasses,

which had become a practically lifelong feature of his face, his aspect was quite altered.

Returning the lens case to his pocket, he brought forth a full mustache of dark brown. He adhered this to his upper lip with a two-sided sticky tape, thereby obliterating for the casual observer a good part of Raleigh Burbage and introducing a reasonable facsimile of Tonio Campanatti.

For a few seconds he stood still and just listened. Not a sound stirred in the outer regions of the lounge. He left the private wash-room with an air of confidence and, taking a key from his trousers pocket, opened No. 249 in the row of lockers. With the grace of a quick-change artist, he almost simultaneously removed his suit coat and replaced it with a light-colored tweed sport jacket whose elbows were reinforced in leather. He also took from the locker a battered black violin case and a fawn-colored felt hat with a high crown. He settled the case on the tile floor while he shut the locker and pocketed the key. Then he dented the hat a bit in the center and slightly pinched the sides, after which he set it foursquare on his head with the brim turned up all around. Then, picking up the violin case, he affected the loping gait which was another of Tonio's

trademarks, and reentered the lobby.

At the desk he finally commanded the attention of one of the several busy clerks. "Have you got a Burbage registered?"

"A what?"

"A Burbage. Initials R. A."

"Oh, I see what you mean. It's somebody's name, sir, is that it?"

"Yes, yes."

"Let me check." The clerk ran a pencil down a hanging file of cards and turned to nod. "R. A. Burbage. Suite ten-twenty. With his wife. You may ring them on the house phone by dialing one oh two oh, sir."

"His wife?" Burbage permitted a fleck of Latin excitement to touch his voice. "You sure? Look again."

Showing mild amusement, the clerk said, "Well, that's what it says here, sir."

Burbage loped away from the desk with the gratifying conviction that this tiny incident would be clearly remembered six or seven hours hence, when the exact time of its occurrence was long lost in the shuffle of a hundred petty details.

As he went through the revolving door at the hotel's side entrance, he saw his reflection in the dusty glass and realized that the high-crowned hat made him look two inches taller—nearly as tall as



Tonio. When the traffic light turned green he crossed the street in the pedestrian current and drifted to the front door of the Pierpont Hotel, an even somewhat older establishment than the Saint Am-

brose. He strode airily inside.

At the desk an elderly gentleman inquired nobly about the reservation.

"Oh yes," said Burbage. "A specification is maybe the right

word, however. And confirmed."

"The name, please?"

"A. V. Camp."

The gentleman lent dignity to his brief consultation with a card index, then permitted himself a parched smile. "I see what you mean, sir. Specified the exact room, didn't you?"

"That is my way."

"A pleasure to accommodate you, Mr. Camp. Sign here if you will."

Burbage printed the name and a nonexistent address in Baltimore. He knew that printing could be identified but not so conclusively as cursive writing and not without a sample for comparison. No samples existed.

"Take Mr. Camp to ten fifty-three," the clerk told the bellhop.

The room was not new to him. He had been here three weeks ago in the course of an inspection tour of several likely hotels in the Saint Ambrose neighborhood. An overnight stay in the Pierpont had convinced him that this room was patent to his purpose. High ceiling, big closet, solid walls demonstrably soundproof, and possessing a fine view of a dozen windows on the tenth floor of the Saint Ambrose across the street, with an especially direct view into the sitting room of suite 1020.

When the bellhop departed Bur-

bage locked and bolted the door, went to the bed and sat on its edge, and then reached for the phone on the night table. As a concession to modernity the Pierpont was equipped with direct dialing for local calls, but before using the phone Burbage studied his watch for perhaps two minutes. Then he dialed the Eastern Airlines desk at Kennedy Airport. Waiting for an answer, he congratulated himself on the fact that the chief merit of his plan was that he was not committed to the final act unless each of the preceding steps was on schedule.

The rhythmic buzz in his ear was replaced by a voice, "Eastern at your service."

"I'm checking on a flight due in from Miami."

"Flight seven two six direct?"

"That's the one. Has it arrived yet?"

"About ten minutes ago, sir. Baggage is coming through now."

Perfect, thought Burbage. "Then I'm not too late. I want to reach a passenger named Antonio Campanatti. Will you page him for me?" If he knew Tonio (and he was sure he did), he could plan on that finical gentleman's being at or near the desk to verify a seat on the return trip to Miami later that day.

"Campanatti? Just a moment,

sir. A man with that name—A moment, sir. Yes, as I thought. Mr. Campanatti is in the area, at the far end of the desk here. I'll have his attention in a moment and direct him to one of our phones."

Half a minute later Tonio's voice, warm and somewhat excited reached him. "Hello, cara mia. I just this second—"

"I'm afraid this is the wrong Burbage, maestro."

"Chi parla, chi parla?"

Burbage said with great relish, "The man with the horns."

"What crazy thing are you up to?"

"I'm simply trying to give you a message of some importance, my boy."

"Elaine, where is she?"

"Taking a bath."

"A bath? Oh yes."

"I imagined you were personally acquainted with that little habit of hers. A cleansing dip after every trip."

"You said a message."

"So I did. Well, we're not at the Hotel Saint Ambrose. A convention of the Hat Manufacturers of America froze us out, so we had to transfer our conference to another place."

"Hats?" Tonio sounded temporarily lost.

"Forget the hats and write this down. We're now at the Pierpont

Hotel. Got that? Pierpont, room ten fifty-three. A taxi will bring you here in twenty minutes."

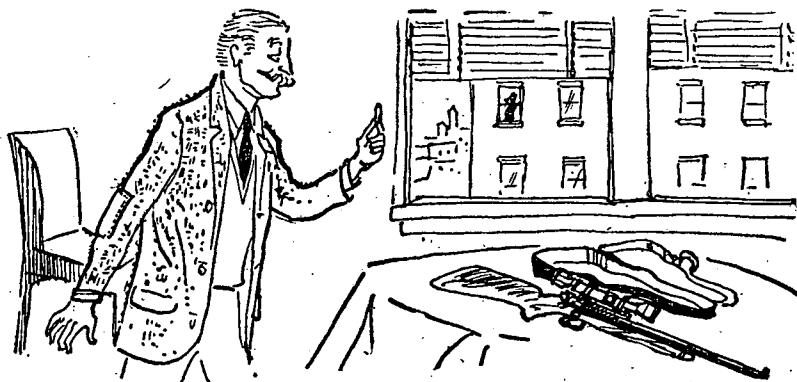
Tonio repeated the instructions in slowly measured syllables, obviously writing everything down.

"Don't bother to ring from the lobby," Burbage said. "Come right up. The latch will be off the door in civilized welcome."

"I believe it when I see it."

Hanging up, Burbage lifted a violin case onto the bed. From his trousers pocket he took a small key with which he unlocked it. Inside, cunningly wrapped in gauze and wedged together to prevent rattling, were the several essential parts which, when united, would become a .44 magnum carbine with telescope sight. Burbage placed each of these parts on the bed, then picked up a small oil-paper envelope and tore it in half. Out dropped a single cartridge. One would be enough. He was sure of this. Ever since childhood he had compensated for his poor eyesight by perfecting himself as a marksman in target practice. Yes, that one cartridge would be plenty. Soft-pointed, it would leave a hole outgoing as big as a fist.

He got up and began to move like a man who has rehearsed a scene many times. First, he carried the empty violin case to a desk chair and set it there, still open.



Next, he went to the bathroom and came back with a face towel. With this he rubbed down every part of the violin case, inside and out, and even polished the key before dropping it on the desk. Then, looping the towel through the handle, he carried the case to the closet and left it there.

If any fingerprints were to be found in this room, they would not be his. He rubbed down the telephone, which he wouldn't be using again, and the night table, though he was pretty certain he hadn't touched it, and finally he flushed the pieces of cartridge envelope down the toilet.

With the preliminary housecleaning done, Burbage began to assemble the carbine. The task was finished in a minute. He walked to the window, carbine in hand, and looked across the busy street at the sun-blinded windows of suite 1020. Then he dragged a

straight-backed chair to the window and placed it under the windowsill with the seat flush against the wall. Still holding the carbine, he brought up a second chair and arranged it back to back with the first. He then sat straddling the second chair and rested the barrel of the carbine on the joined backs and sighted through the scope. The bead was steady.

He got up and opened the window.

He checked his watch: two p.m. Unless Elaine had drastically changed her bathing ritual, she should have emerged from the tub by now, and be well into those post-ablutionary ministrations which she always held so dear. In another five minutes, she should appear at the bedroom door in a low-bodiced conference dress.

Burbage picked the cartridge from the bed and walked back to the shooting chairs and sat down.

Holding the carbine across his thighs he slid the cartridge into the side loading port. After more than three months of planning he was ready for action.

As he sat there sighting in, his thoughts were grim. Five years ago he had discovered Elaine in the cast of a light-opera company and had been smitten, and she had seemed to reciprocate. His better judgment had told him that his money must be the main attraction, but his vanity, speaking in ever a louder voice, counseled him otherwise. Finally, like a fool, he'd rushed her off to Mexico and marriage. Much too late he'd learned that marriage wasn't essential to having Elaine; other men had found that out before him; others were continuing to find it out at his expense. Now Tonio was enjoying the fruits so freely given, but this time it was said with love. Burbage's assessment of the situation was, he felt, realistic: Tonio wanted to have and to hold Elaine and all the money she could possibly wring from her rich husband in a divorce settlement. Tonio wanted to play house for keeps, but what Tonio failed to fathom was the depths of Burbage's pride, and the money be damned. Nobody was going to make a public cuckold of Raleigh Burbage and get away with it. You can bank on

that. Burbage would see to it.

Even as he was thinking these corrosive thoughts, his right cheek resting against the carbine stock, the scope sight took him with a tingling intimacy to the bedroom door of suite 1020. That door was now opening.

Suddenly there she was in all her garish blonde beauty. Predictably, she wore a frock of silver lamé with a neckline that plunged only for Tonio. The crosshairs of the scope settled at that seductive cleft with the same remorseless intent of the sighting eye. A disciplined forefinger applied gradual pressure to the three-pound trigger. Elaine's freshly painted mouth was open with an inquiry of the empty room when she was hit.

Rising swiftly, Burbage reached for the towel on the bed and massaged the carbine from muzzle to butt, then stood it in the closet beside the violin case. It could never be traced to him.

Burbage ran the towel over everything he had touched, from the windowframe to chair legs. The sound the gun had made was now fading in his ears and he could detect no consequential sounds in the corridor. As the critical moment faded, his glacial calm began to yield to a sense of high excitement. His hands trembled a bit. It was as if he were

only beginning to anticipate what he had already accomplished.

Unbolting the door, he opened it a crack. The corridor was empty. He nearly left then without the felt hat. That would never do. He retrieved it from the bureau and used it to wipe the doorknob, after making sure that the lock was so set as to allow Tonio easy ingress. Then he hurried to the service stairs and went down them two at a time. He had gambled, rightly, on the service elevator being preferred by the help to the stairs; he met nobody all the way down to the mezzanine, where he took an automated elevator to the rear foyer.

Within a minute he was at the side entrance of the Saint Ambrose. A few minutes later he saw Tonio emerge from a taxi in front of the

falsely baited, decrepit Pierpont.

First fiddle playing second fiddle for a change, he thought. Already he could visualize the newspaper headlines: Lover Thwarts Marital Reconciliation. Violinist Carries Death Weapon in Case.

Burbage went to a phone booth in the lobby and called the police. "Somebody just shot a gun out of a window in the Hotel Pierpont," he said, and hung up as the desk officer began to ask a question.

In another five minutes he, as the grief-stricken husband, would phone the police from his suite. Meanwhile, he must hasten to the men's lounge and convert himself from a semblance of A. V. Campanatti to the one and only Raleigh Burbage. He made his way through the busy lobby, as one passing shadow among many.



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I want to thank all of you for your interest.

Most sincerely,

Pat Hitchcock

As appearances to the mind are variable, so, of necessity, are the interpretations of each dissemblance.



THIS one," said Marcus, "is fancy."

Bobo Fuller, deliberately spaced the maximum distance away on the seat of the police car, stared gloomily out the window at the passing buildings. They were moving through sparse traffic at an almost leisurely pace, and the siren was silent. This, to Fuller, was a violation of proper procedure, almost an offense against propriety. Two cops going to a murder, in his opinion, should be going at high speed with siren howling. But Marcus, unfortunately, believed that should be left to the ambulances and the fire trucks. After all, there was no great rush. The scene of the murder was secured in status quo by uniformed patrolmen, sent early to the scene, and it was certain the corpse wasn't go-

*A Novelette
by
Fletcher Flora*

ing anywhere. High speeds made him nervous, Marcus said, and sirens made his head ache.

"Fancy how?" Fuller asked.

"As I get it," Marcus said, "this guy named Draper was asleep in his bed this morning, and someone walked in and stabbed him."

"That doesn't sound fancy to me. It sounds simple."

"I didn't mean fancy that way. It happened to a fancy guy who lived in a fancy place. That's what I meant."

"Thanks." Fuller's voice was tainted just enough by bitterness to register his animus while sustaining diplomacy. "It's nice to be informed. Was this Draper married?"

"He was."

"Where was his wife when he was getting stabbed?"

"A good question, Fuller. At the first opportunity, let's ask her."

They had turned, meanwhile, onto a broad boulevard split down the middle by a raised medial strip which was planted with bluegrass and evergreens, in an area devoted largely to apartment buildings and hotels. They stopped in front of a hotel, the Southworth, and got out. In spite of a bronze name plaque and a canopy from curb to entrance, the place was not really so fancy. What Marcus had meant was that the Southworth was un-

doubtedly expensive. This conviction was in no degree weakened by the resplendent doorman who held the door open for them.

"It's on the fifth floor," Marcus said over his shoulder as he crossed the lobby to the elevator, with Fuller trailing. "We'll go right up."

Getting out on the fifth floor, they went down the hall and around a corner to 519. Marcus opened the door, already slightly ajar, and entered a short hallway created by the protrusion of a bathroom, which was immediately on his right. A few feet farther on, he came into the bedroom of a two-room suite. Again to his right, headboard flush against the interior wall of the bathroom, was a double bed. Beside the bed, staring down as if bemused by death and the prospects of heaven, was a gray, dehydrated little man with a stethoscope hanging out of his side coat pocket. The stethoscope was just dressing, a kind of professional emblem in support of the caduceus. The gray little man had not needed it, for the man on the bed, the object of his bemused stare, was as clearly dead as a knife driven into the soft hollow at the base of his throat could make him. He had bled a lot, and the blood had soaked the front of his white silk pajamas and spread in a great stain

over white cotton sheets. The gray little man looked up at Marcus with curiously angry eyes.

"Hello, Marcus," he said. "You're running late."

Marcus walked around the bed and stopped beside it in the narrow clearance between the bed and the wall. Fuller remained on the other side, behind the medical examiner, and surveyed the carnage with a forced air of detachment. It was Fuller's secret shame that the sight and smell of blood made him queasy.

"Sometimes I do." Marcus, returning the stare of blind eyes, resisted a desire to close them. "He certainly bled a lot, didn't he?"

"You generally do when your throat's cut."

"How long has he been dead?"

"Since seconds after he was stabbed."

"When was he stabbed?"

"Not long ago. Say around nine o'clock. Shortly before he was found."

"Who found him?"

"Should I know? I just pronounce them dead, Marcus. You're the cop."

"Right. He was sleeping when it happened, sleeping on his back. How did whoever did it get in here? These hotel doors lock automatically when they're closed. You can't open them from outside

without a key. Don't bother to answer, Doc. You've already told me that I'm the cop."

Marcus, sacrificing a handkerchief, reached down with a faint fastidious feeling of revulsion and extracted the knife, carefully preserving in the process the fingerprints which he was convinced would not be there.

The knife was a common kitchen paring knife. It was of poor quality, but plenty good enough and sharp enough, for all that, to peel a potato or trim a steak or cut a throat. You could buy it, or one like it, in thousands of hardware stores or department stores or dime stores. In brief, it was impossible to trace or to identify as the property of any person. Were knives like this available in the hotel kitchen? If so, it would be at least a beginning, but Marcus, the perennial pessimist, bet bitterly that they weren't.

He had been aware all the while of voices and movement in the room behind him, the second room of the suite. Now, abruptly, carrying the knife in the handkerchief, he went through the communicating door. A couple of technicians were working expertly at their scientific hocus-pocus. One of the pair of patrolmen who had arrived first on the scene was standing by the hall door. Marcus,

with a wave of a hand to the technicians, approached the patrolman. The latter identified himself and, at Marcus' request, gave a report so brief and orderly that it had apparently been arranged and edited in his mind beforehand for the purpose of making a high efficiency rating. It did, in fact, and Marcus mentally noted it.

The patrolman and his partner had received at nine-twenty the radio message which had sent them to the Southworth. They were cruising nearby and had arrived at nine-twenty-seven. They had found the hotel manager, a Mr. Clinton Garland, fresh from the chamber of horrors, maintaining a resolute guard in the hall outside the bedroom door. The body had been discovered by a hotel maid who had come in her regular routine to put fresh towels in the bathroom. The maid had set up a howl that had reached in relays to the manager's office, and he had come at once in the company of the captain of bellboys, who had been dispatched to summon the police. The patrolmen, arriving, had relieved the manager of guard duty. Nothing, subsequently, had been touched until the invasion of investigators.

"Where," asked Marcus, "is his wife?"

The patrolman looked stricken,

realizing at once that he had, in his orderly and edited report, been guilty of an egregious omission. "Wife, sir?"

"Right. Wife. He had one, you know."

"As a matter of fact, sir, I didn't know."

"I take it, then, that she hasn't been in evidence since you got here?"

"No, sir. No wife."

"No matter. We'll turn her up in good time. Where's the manager now?"

"Waiting in his office on the ground floor. He was pretty badly shaken up. I thought it would be all right to let him go."

"You did everything fine. Now you and your partner better get back on patrol."

Marcus turned back into the room and put the paring knife in its cotton nest on a table near a technician who was methodically dusting for prints.

"You can check the handle of this," he said, "but you won't find anything."

He walked back through the communicating door into the bedroom. The medical examiner had gone, but Fuller lingered.

"Have a look around, Fuller, and see what you can come up with. Odds are you won't find anything that means anything, but I



guess we ought to try." Marcus, speaking, reached the hall door. "I'm going down to see the manager. I'll be back up pretty soon." He went out, and Fuller began looking for something that meant something.

Marcus, however, did not go directly down to the manager. He was delayed, almost before he started. In the hall, he was arrested by a sudden sharp hissing sound, rather like the warning of a startled snake, and he saw that the door across the hall had opened far enough to allow the passage of what appeared to be the decapitated head of somebody's grandmother. It had white hair parted in the middle and drawn back on both sides of the part into a bun; an avid little face, full of wrinkles, with a tight little mouth that looked very much like another wrinkle with teeth; rimless glasses slipped down the bridge of a pointed nose, and behind them, peeping over the rimless glass with an effect of slyness, a pair of alert, inquisitive eyes. Marcus thought wildly of a wicked wren.

"Did you hiss?" he asked politely.

She nodded briskly and darted a glance both directions in the hall, seeming thereby to invite Marcus into a conspiracy. "Is it true?" she whispered.

"It may be," Marcus said. "Is what true, precisely?"

"Is Mark Draper dead?"

"He is."

"Murdered?"

"Unfortunately, yes."

The white head nodded again. The bright eyes glittered over glass. "Small wonder."

"Oh? You think so? Why?"

"Some people are born to be murdered." The whisper was now barely audible. "And some people are born to be murderers."

"That's an interesting theory. I'd be pleased to hear you develop it."

"I know a thing or two. I do indeed."

"I shouldn't wonder."

"I have an instinct. I feel things."

"Madam, instinct is not allowed in a court of law. However, when supported by adequate evidence, it may prove useful in an investigation. May I come in?"

"Please do."

She widened the crack in the door just enough for him to slip through, then quickly and quietly closed it behind him. The conspiratorial atmosphere, Marcus thought, was really becoming a bit absurd.

"Permit me to introduce myself," he said. "Lieutenant Joseph Marcus."

"I'm Lucretia Bridges. Won't you sit down?"

They looked at each other across five feet of green carpet in a room which betrayed itself by the presence of many small additions of whatnot, obviously personal, as a place of permanent residence. Luccretia, clearly, was no transient. She was one of a swelling company of hotel dwellers.

"You have a theory," Marcus said. "Also an instinct. I'm interested in both."

Her white head bobbed, and again Marcus was wildly reminded of a wicked wren.

"Mark Draper," she said, "was no better than he should have been."

"Most of us aren't."

"He drank and he gambled and he kept late hours."

Marcus, who was guilty of the first and the last, although not the second, clucked disapprovingly. "Is that so?"

"It is. Moreover, he was a wastrel, and he didn't work."

Marcus' cluck was somewhat more genuine now. He himself was not guilty on either of these counts, being far too poor to afford them. "If he didn't work, how could he afford to maintain residence in a place like this? It must be very expensive."

"It is. He had money. He inherited it, more than he could spend in a lifetime, wastrel though

he was. Why else do you imagine that sly little baggage married him?"

"Baggage?" Marcus made a rapid mental adjustment. "Oh, yes. His wife, of course."

"She's much younger than he was, years and years. Disparity in ages makes for a bad situation. It invites trouble."

"How so?"

"I was never unfaithful to Mr. Bridges. Never!"

"That's commendable, I'm sure. Mrs. Draper, you think, was unfaithful to Mr. Draper?"

"I know what I know."

"Instinct?"

"I have eyes. I see what's going on."

Marcus didn't doubt it. Witnesses, however, to be of value, must be somewhat more specific. "What did you see? When did you see it?"

"Comings and goings. Mr. Draper was gone much of the time, you see. He didn't work; but he was forever off somewhere, and she was always having callers. In the daytime, mind you. I always think it's so much more shameful in the daytime, don't you?"

Marcus had no preference, day or night, but he repeated his useful cluck. "So flagrant," he said.

"Exactly. I could drop a few names that would surprise certain

folk." She waited for Marcus' cue.

"Surprise me."

"That young Mr. Tiber who lives on the floor above, Jerome Tiber. He was most brazen of all. As you said, so flagrant. I'm certain that she had given him a key."

"To her room?"

"She must have. I've seen him enter, bold as brass, without knocking."

"That's interesting. That's very interesting, indeed."

"He wasn't the only one, however. There are those, so to speak, who have keys by right of position."

"Such as?"

"Well, I'm sure that Mr. Clinton Garland visited her far more often than was necessary."

"The hotel manager?"

"There is simply no occasion, I mean, for a hotel manager to go to a guest's room so frequently. And that bell captain, Lewis Varna. One would think Dolly Draper spent half her time thinking up one pretext or another to get him to her room."

"Her tastes, if I understand your implications, were remarkably catholic."

"It's more to the point, I think, to conclude that she had no taste at all."

"She seems to be missing this morning, incidentally. Do you

happen to know where she is now?"

"I'm sure I don't," Lucretia Bridges said, then added with a monstrous improbity that took Marcus' wind away, "I am one who strictly minds her own affairs."

The shock of it brought him to his feet. He had acquired enough food for thought, in any event, to tax his mental molars. He looked around and tried to think of a graceful exit line. "You have a pleasant room," he said. "Do you live here as a permanent guest?"

"Yes. I find residing in a hotel so convenient. I've been here nearly ten years, since shortly after Mr. Bridges died."

"He must have left you well off."

"Indeed he did. Winston was a wonderful man, poor dear. He died so suddenly. No warning whatever. We were just beginning dinner, and he fell right over into his soup. There was no time even to fetch a doctor."

"Well, thank you for your help, Mrs. Bridges. It's possible that I may want to talk with you again."

"I am at your service," said Lucretia, and followed Marcus to the door, where he said good-by. As he passed through, she had, woman-wise, the last word.

"When you find Dolly Draper," she said, "you must be on your guard. She is quite deceptive, and

appears to be what she is not. I tell you she's a bad woman. She's evil."

The ancient and ominous adjective seemed to hang in the air and repeat itself in whispers. The hall, as Marcus walked down it toward the elevators, seemed suddenly colder and darker than it was.

Mr. Clinton Garland, surrounded by walnut paneling, was waiting behind his walnut desk. He was impeccably dressed, his hair was all present and sleekly brushed, and his face, properly composed for a tragic occasion, was handsome enough to qualify him as the moderator of a TV quiz show, although a bit long in the nose. As he rose and extended manicured fingers, Marcus could detect that Mr. Garland had taken a very large drop for his nerves.

After introductions Marcus said, "This is bad business."

"Indeed it is," Garland said, retrieving his hand after token contact. "It will do the Southworth no good, Lieutenant. No good at all."

"It didn't do Mark Draper any good, either."

"It's dreadful. Simply dreadful. Whoever could have done such a monstrous thing?"

"We'll try to find out. I'm hoping you can help."

"I'll do what I can, of course, but I'm afraid it will be very little."

"Perhaps," said Marcus, "you will just tell me about your own part in the affair."

"Certainly. I was right here in my office, discussing several routine matters with Lewis Varna, the bell captain. When the news reached the lobby, one of the bellboys reported it to the desk clerk, and the desk clerk brought it immediately to me."

"What time was that?"

"I'm not sure. I was naturally so distraught by the news that I failed to make proper note of things. It was after nine. Before the half hour, I think. Sometime between."

"Never mind. Go on, please."

"Well, Lewis and I rushed up, of course, and I went into the room and verified the report." Garland repressed a shudder. "So much blood! It was dreadful. Simply dreadful."

"Which room did you enter?"

"Which room? Why, the room in which Mr. Draper had been stabbed, of course."

"I thought you might have entered the adjoining one."

"No, no, I went directly from the hall into the bedroom."

"Was the door closed and locked?"

"If it were closed, it would automatically be locked. It wasn't. Poor Mrs. Grimm, the maid, had rushed into the hall screaming and

had left the door standing open behind her. What a dreadful experience for the poor soul!"

"Draper was apparently sleeping when he was stabbed. Do your maids enter the bedrooms of your guests when they are sleeping?"

"Certainly not. However, Mrs. Grimm had encountered Mrs. Draper on the floor below about half an hour earlier, and Mrs. Draper had told Mrs. Grimm that Mr. Draper was sleeping late, but that it would be quite all right to slip in quietly and change the towels. As a matter of fact, Mr. Draper was chronically a late sleeper, and it was understood that the maid could slip into the bathroom when necessary. After all, our maids must perform their services."

"Where was Mrs. Draper going when she encountered the maid on the lower floor? Do you know?"

"She was in the company of Mrs. Bryan Lancaster, who occupies a two-room suite on that floor with her husband. Mrs. Draper and Mrs. Lancaster met the maid just as they were descending the stairs. They had been up in Mrs. Draper's suite and were walking down to Mrs. Lancaster's. The maid saw them enter."

"You seem to have a fair number of permanent guests in this hotel."

"That's true. We rather cater to them. Our rates are not excessive for the comforts and services offered."

"Naturally. Anyhow, I'm delighted finally to have crossed the trail of Mrs. Draper. I've found her rather elusive."

"Elusive? Not at all. She has been in Mrs. Lancaster's suite all this while. After she heard the news about her husband she was prostrate, of course. Simply prostrate. What a dreadful thing to happen to the poor little thing! Mrs. Lancaster has been taking care of her."

"What's the number of Mrs. Lancaster's suite?"

"421. I trust, if you must talk with Mrs. Draper, that you will be considerate."

"I am always," said Marcus, "considerate of everyone." He fished for a cigarette, found one and lit it. "What did you do after seeing the body?" he continued.

"I sent Lewis Varna to summon the police, and I remained in the hall outside the door until the police came. Then, with their permission, I came back here. I was limp. Simply limp!"

"I know. It was a dreadful experience. Where is the maid now? I'll need to talk with her."

"I have her standing by. Lewis Varna, too. I was certain that

you'd want to see them sometime."
"Good. I'll see them together. Two birds, you know, with one stone."

Clinton Garland left the room, and was back in less than two minutes with Lewis Varna and Mrs. Grimm. The former was a slender, swarthy young man with black curly hair, courteous but not deferential, who undoubtedly would be attractive to the ladies. The latter was a small woman, almost dainty, neatly uniformed in crisp white. Her hair was going gray, but her face still retained a smooth, youthful quality, and her throat, in the vulnerable area beneath the chin, its taut elasticity. Marcus was surprised. He had expected, somehow, someone canted sidewise from carrying a mop bucket.

Lewis Varna, at Marcus' request, reported first. His report was concise, and it supported in all significant details the prior report of Clinton Garland. Which might mean, Marcus realized with the detached skepticism of his trade, that the pair had told separately the simple truth, or that they had, on the other hand, plotted their stories in the ample time that had been allowed them. Marcus was invariably skeptical of any pair who alibied each other so neatly, especially, in this case, a pair who

carried passkeys. Still, the alibi was not airtight. There was, after all, the crucial time *before* Garland and Varna met in the office for their discussion of hotel matters.

"Let's see," Marcus said casually. "You and Mr. Garland were right here together when you first heard the report of the murder. How long would you say you had been here?"

Varna got the point. So did Garland. Their eyes met, struck sparks, and passed, but Varna's expression did not otherwise alter. He remained a perfect picture of candor, as one who was willing to accept the digressions of a police investigation, but recognized, nevertheless, the basic absurdity of them.

"It's hard to say. We were not, of course, particularly conscious of time. What would you say, Mr. Garland? Half an hour?"

"There was quite a number of things on the agenda," Garland said. "Half an hour would be a conservative estimate. Nearer forty-five minutes, I'd say."

"I see." Marcus turned to Mrs. Grimm. "Madam, you had a trying experience."

"It was a shock. A terrible shock."

"Have you sufficiently recovered to talk about it?"

"I'm all right now, thank you."

And she did, indeed, seem quite composed. She stood erect with her feet together and her hands folded in front of her. Her eyes, with the proper deference of a servant before masters, were fixed on an imaginary spot somewhere over Marcus' head.

"You entered the bedroom shortly after nine, I understand. Is that correct?"

"It must have been. I'm not positive."

"The medical examiner estimates that Mr. Draper was murdered around nine. You must have just missed a scene more shocking than the one you saw."

"I try not to think of that, sir."

"Right. Nothing to be gained from magnifying horrors. Did you see anyone near the door before you entered?"

"No, sir."

"Anyone in the hall at all?"

"No one."

"You went in to change the towels in the bathroom, I believe. Were you also going to change the sheets on the bed?"

"No, sir. Mr. Draper was sleeping late. I had seen Mrs. Draper on the floor below, and she told me it would be all right to slip into the bathroom quietly."

"Did you, indeed, change the towels?"

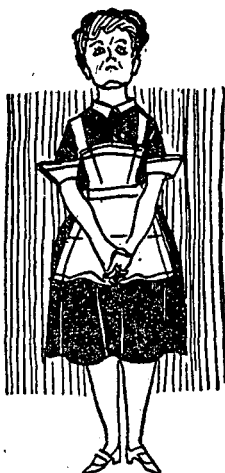
Mrs. Grimm thought for a mo-

ment, then slowly shook her head.

"Now that you put the question, sir, I don't believe I did. It was the shock, you see. I'm rather confused in my mind about things."

"Understandably so. Just tell me briefly what you did after seeing the body of Mr. Draper."

"I screamed and ran from the



room and down the hall. I must have screamed several times, and my head was spinning. At the elevator, I ran into a bellboy who had just come up from the lobby. He helped me to a vacant room and put me on the bed there. The guest had checked out early, you see, and the door was standing open. A few minutes later, when I was not so faint, I thought that I had better see Mr. Garland at once, but when I went into the hall again,

I saw Mr. Garland standing guard outside Mr. Draper's door. I didn't wish to go near that room again, so I came down here and waited. That's all, sir. That's all I can remember."

"Very good. Thank you, Mrs. Grimm."

"Are you finished, Lieutenant?" Garland asked.

"For the present, yes."

Garland nodded at the bell captain and the maid. "You are free to go now."

They left, and so, after a polite word of parting with the manager, did Marcus.

He rapped lightly beneath the neat chrome numbers: 421. A mnemonic gem, second number half the first, third number half the second. Remember the first, you got them all.

The mnemonic gem retreated as the door swung inward, revealing a young man wearing a gray cardigan. He had thick brown rebellious hair, a slightly crooked nose, and an expression that was, all in all, inordinately cheerful for the circumstances.

"Mr. Lancaster?" Marcus queried.

The young man grinned and shook his head. "No such luck. Old Bryan's off doing his daily stint. Tiber's the name. Jerome Tiber."

"Oh? I'm Lieutenant Marcus. Police. I'm looking for Mrs. Mark Draper."

"This is as far as you go, Lieutenant. Dolly's here, safe and sound, although, as you will understand, a bit upset. I must say that you've been an unconscionable time getting to us. We've been waiting for you."

"Well, here I am at last. Now where is Mrs. Draper?"

"Come in. I'll get her for you."

Marcus entered. On a low table before a sofa stood a silver pot that emitted the aromatic odor of hot coffee. Beside the pot, a cup, half full, sat in its saucer. Marcus sat on the sofa, smelled the coffee and coveted a cup.

Jerome Tiber, at the communicating door, spoke cheerfully into the adjoining room. "Dolly, my darling, your sins have found you out. You had better emerge and face the consequences."

In response to this airy summons, two young women came into the room. One of them was rather tall, with bright red hair, and had about her the firmly benevolent attitude of one who is determinedly giving aid and comfort to someone else. This one, Marcus guessed rightly, was Mrs. Bryan Lancaster.

The other, then, was Dolly Draper. Marcus, rising to meet her,

was aware instantly of a feeling to which he should have, at his age, developed immunity long ago. Tenderness? Affinity? The faint siren singing of September Song? Say, for decency's sake, fatherliness. For Dolly Draper, who was surely at least in her middle twenties, looked to be in her late teens. And she was small; small and slim with an innocently seductive body now poured into a white cashmere sweater and a pair of red slacks. Her hair, which was the soft yellow color of ripe field corn, was little longer than a contemporary male folk songster's. Her eyes were grave and gray. She sat down on the edge of a straight chair and folded her hands on her knees. She did not seem grieved. She seemed only infinitely sad.

"Damn it, Jerry," said the red-headed Mrs. Lancaster, "please don't be quite so cheerful. It's absolutely obscene."

Tiber, undaunted, waved a hand and made a little bow. "Gloom accomplishes nothing. 'The Moving Finger writes; and, having writ . . . ' You know the bit, darling. One must have a philosophical attitude, I say. Besides, I must add, someone, however reprehensible his method, has done me a service. He has, in brief, removed my competition."

During this remarkable speech,

Dolly Draper sat quietly with her grave gray eyes turned on the speaker, and the faintest shadow of a sad and tender smile touched her pink lips. "Darling," she said, "I know you mean well, but you mustn't say such things. It isn't proper."

"It's obscene, that's what it is," said the redhead. "Jerry, mind your manners."

"What? Oh, yes. Introductions are in order. Mrs. Draper, Mrs. Lancaster, Lieutenant Marcus. Lieutenant Marcus, as we have anticipated, is of the police. Since we are clearly to be on familiar terms in this business, I suggest that we abandon formality at once. If you choose, Lieutenant, you may call these alliterative ladies Dolly and Lucy."

Marcus did not choose. "Mrs. Draper," he said, "this is a grim affair, and I understand that it must be very difficult for you. I'm sorry."

"I feel much better now." She smiled sadly at her folded hands. "I suppose, now that the shock has worn off, that I'm not even particularly surprised."

"Oh? What do you mean by that?"

"Well, to be truthful, poor Mark was really a rather disagreeable man, and he was always running around to all sorts of places and

associating with all sorts of undesirable persons."

"What places? What persons?"

Dolly Draper lifted her hands in a helpless little gesture, and immediately folded them again. "I don't know, actually. Just places and persons."

"Didn't he ever take you with him?"

"Oh, no. I don't care for such places and persons."

"Mrs. Draper, men are seldom murdered simply for being disagreeable."

"On that score," said Jerry Tiber, "you can make an exception of old Mark."

"Shut up, Jerry," Lucy Lancaster said. "Lieutenant, why do you keep looking at the coffee pot? Would you like a cup?"

"No, thank you," Marcus lied.

"Nonsense. Of course you would. I can tell by the way your nostrils twitch. Jerry, get a cup for the lieutenant."

"There isn't a clean one. Room service only sent up three, and we've used them all."

"Well, I'm sure there's no insurmountable difficulty. Go and rinse a cup in the lavatory."

Jerry went obediently, with reasonably good grace, and Marcus, feeling uneasily that he was somehow not controlling the situation, turned his attention again to Dolly

Draper to revive the case at hand.

"Are you suggesting," he said, "that an outsider slipped into the hotel and murdered your husband?"

"Perhaps a guest. A transient. I suspect he's checked out and gone by this time."

"That's possible, of course. But how did he get into the room?"

"I suppose he came through the door. Isn't that how one usually gets into a room?"

"Usually. In this instance, I don't see how. Mrs. Draper, the door of the bedroom was locked. So was the hall door of the adjoining room. How would a transient guest, not possessing a key, get into either room of the suite?"

"Is that a problem? I would say, offhand, that Mark let him in."

"Your husband was sleeping when he was stabbed."

"Was he? How do you know?"

Marcus started to respond and stopped suddenly before making a sound, his mouth open in the middle of a rather foolish expression. Which was, for Marcus, extraordinary.

"He looked as if he'd been sleeping," he said finally, and the words limped in his own ears.

"If you care for my opinion," Dolly Draper said, "you have started off with a very large assumption that may be wrong. Anyone

could arrange a body on a bed so as to make it appear to have died sleeping."

"Have you heard that he was stabbed at the base of the throat from the front?"

"I've heard that, yes. It was a cruel thing to do to poor old Mark."

"How in the devil could someone have approached your husband with a knife and stabbed him neatly in such a spot when he was awake and erect and aware of what was going on?"

"Did I say he was erect? I don't believe I did. When Lucy and I left my suite this morning, Mark had a terrible headache. He was so beastly about it, grumpy and all, that he was simply intolerable. That's why Lucy and I decided to move down here to her place. Before we came, however, I gave Mark a sedative and sent him back to bed. If someone came to the door soon after we left, before the sedative had taken effect, Mark would have let him in, and then, if it was someone he knew well, he would have lain back down and closed his eyes. It's quite possible, you know, to carry on a conversation while lying on your back with your eyes closed. As a matter of fact, he has often done it with me. He was always having severe headaches in the morning, often

from hangovers, and he frequently lay in bed while I was up and about, and we would talk, and all the while his eyes would be closed. It's better for a headache, of course, if you keep the light out of your eyes."

Marcus, who was not without experience himself, was forced to concede the point. He looked at Dolly Draper with a kind of growing wonder.

"It's a reasonable explanation," he said. "Do you have any idea who may have called on your husband this morning after you left?"

"Oh, no. It was quite impossible to know who might call on Mark, or when, or why."

"We must at least conclude that the purpose this time was murder."

"Must we? Maybe not. Maybe it was something that was incited and done on the spur of the moment."

"I doubt it. I doubt if anyone, unless he plans to use it, goes calling with an ordinary kitchen paring knife in his pocket."

"Was that what poor Mark was stabbed with? Imagine it, Lucy, an ordinary kitchen paring knife!"

Thus summarily challenged, it remained unknown if Lucy Lancaster's imagination was equal to the occasion. At that moment, carrying a rinsed cup on a saucer, Jerome Tiber came back into the

room. He poured coffee into the cup and handed it to Marcus.

"There you are, Lieutenant. Compliments of the house."

"Thanks," Marcus acknowledged, then turned to Lucy. "Why did you go upstairs to Mrs. Draper's suite so early this morning?" he asked.

"It wasn't particularly early. It was just after eight o'clock. Do you imagine that we are all the indolent rich or something?"

"Excuse me. Why did you go?"

"Because Dolly called me on the telephone and asked me, that's why. She wanted to show me a silver cigarette box she bought yesterday afternoon. It plays 'Smoke Gets in Your Eyes' when you open the lid."

"I thought it was rather clever," Dolly said. "Cigarettes and smoke in your eyes and all that, I mean."

Marcus was not diverted. "And shortly afterward you decided to come down here?"

"We were practically forced to," Dolly said. "We were going to have our coffee there, but Mark behaved so abominably and kept shouting at us to keep quiet and everything, that we left."

"On the way here, I understand, you met the maid in the hall."

"Yes. The maid who always does our rooms."

"And you told her that it would

be all right if she slipped in and changed the towels in the bathroom?"

"I didn't think it would disturb Mark. He'd had the sedative, as I said, and I was sure he'd be asleep again by the time the maid got around."

"I've talked with the maid. She says she saw no one near the bedroom. If your husband admitted someone to the room, he was gone before the maid got there."

"Well, murderers seldom stick around after committing murder, do they?"

Marcus was compelled to admit that they seldom did. He decided also that he had stuck around as long as it was profitable. He drained his cup, set it aside, and rose to his feet. "Thank you very much," he said. "It's time I was getting on to other things. I'm sorry to have intruded."

"Are you going back upstairs?" Jerome Tiber wanted to know.

"That's right."

"I'm going that way. I'll just drop you off if you don't mind."

Marcus didn't mind. In fact, he welcomed the chance to get the remarkable Jerome Tiber a few minutes alone. Having said good-by to Dolly and Lucy, they departed together.

"I understand," said Marcus, "that you and Mrs. Draper are

what some may call good friends."

"I'm working at it," Tiber said cheerfully.

"It has even been suggested that you have a key to her door."

"A key? Nonsense. Why should I need a key? If the coast was clear, as they say in the cheaper thrillers, Dolly could always give me a ring and extend an invitation. I had no wish, believe me, to wander in on old Mark with a hot key in my hand." He stopped and shot Marcus a startled glance. "Are you by any chance implying, Lieutenant, that I could have admitted myself this morning and done old Mark in?"

"One has to explore the possibilities."

"Well, you may have guessed that I wasn't exactly one of old Mark's fans, but on the other hand I wasn't his mortal enemy either. Dear as little Dolly is, she isn't worth the risk. Suggested by whom?"

"What?"

"Who suggested that I might have a key?"

"Someone who claims to have seen you enter without knocking."

"Never mind. It must have been the old witch across the hall. When Dolly invited me down, she sometimes left the door slightly ajar. It expedited matters."

"I see."

They had climbed the stairs to the upper floor, and now they paused for a breather before Jerome Tiber continued his ascent.

"Well," he said, "I suppose we must part here. Friends, I hope. I don't suppose you'd be willing to let me come along and poke about the murder scene a bit?"

"No."

"I thought you wouldn't. Well, no matter. It's just that I have such a morbid curiosity. Good sleuthing, Lieutenant."

Jerome Tiber went on up the stairs, and Marcus, lingering, heard him begin to whistle softly as he went.

Fuller was at a window with his head out. He pulled it in and turned as Marcus entered. Marcus, however, veered off into the bathroom.

Mrs. Grimm's memory, he saw, had served her well. The towels in the bathroom had been used, and there were no fresh ones in evidence.

On the wide surface into which the lavatory was sunk, among a variety of jars and bottles, was a clear plastic container of capsules. Marcus, examining it, satisfied himself that the capsules contained the sedative which Mark Draper was reported to have taken, then went into the bedroom. Fuller was still standing by the window. The

police ambulance had come and gone, and the body of Mark Draper was no longer on the bed. Marcus, who was not fond of bodies, was relieved.

"There's a narrow ledge," Fuller said. "Outside, a narrow ledge below the windows. It would be a risky trick, but a man could conceivably inch his way along it. The window was unlocked."

"Oh." Marcus seemed abstracted. "I don't think so."

"Why not?"

"As you said, too risky. Not only of falling, but of being seen from the street. Besides, how could anyone coming in that way be sure that Draper was in bed and asleep at nine o'clock in the morning? For that matter, how could he be sure that Mrs. Draper wasn't here?"

"I didn't say I had all the answers." Fuller's voice was abrupt, almost harsh. "It's just something to think about."

"Oh, right, Fuller. Any signs of a search in the room?"

"Nothing apparent."

"Anything seem to be missing?"

"Nothing obvious. We'd have to ask Mrs. Draper to be sure."

"I don't think it will be necessary. Draper wasn't killed by any burglar. That's plain."

"It is? I admit it doesn't look likely, but how can you be so

sure? The ledge isn't *that* narrow."

Marcus' air of abstraction still pertained. He stood by the bed and pinched his lower lip and stared at the floor. He seemed for a moment not to have heard.

"I'm sure," he said after the moment had passed, "because *I know who did kill him.*"

Fuller, trained by experience in stoicism, said quietly, "That's very interesting. Maybe you wouldn't mind telling *me.*"

"Not yet, Fuller, not yet." Marcus perked up, as if he were brushing the whole vexing business from his mind. "Because I don't know *why*. I can't for the life of me see *why.*"

He turned toward the door abruptly. "Come on, Fuller. We might as well get out of here. There's nothing more at the moment to be done."

In Fuller's opinion, there was, on the contrary, a lot to be done. There was, for example, a murderer to be arrested. If, that is, Marcus actually knew the murderer's identity. Personally, Fuller doubted it. To put it kindly, Marcus was merely trying to measure up to some exaggerated image he had of himself. Behold the great detective! To put it less kindly and more honestly, Marcus was a liar.

Fuller didn't venture the accusa-

tion, but his conviction was supported by what happened in the next six days. Indeed, so far as Fuller himself was involved, nothing happened at all. Marcus, for two days, was around headquarters. He had a session with the chief and another session with the chief and the district attorney together. He spent quite a lot of time on the telephone discussing with someone something that Fuller wasn't privileged to know and couldn't get into position to overhear. Then Marcus disappeared. He simply dropped out of sight. To all appearances, Mark Draper had been judged expendable. His murder, apparently, incited no concern.

Then, after four days, Marcus reappeared. He simply turned up again. Fuller, invading his office in the afternoon of the fourth day, found him sitting slumped behind his desk looking across it silently at Mrs. Grimm, who was sitting erect in a straight chair with a purse gripped in her lap. The knuckles of her hands were white. Her face was like a stone.

"Oh, Fuller, there you are," Marcus said. "I've been asking for you."

"That's considerate of you," Fuller said. "Where have you been?"

"Why, I've been all over, Fuller. Both coasts and back. On the Dra-

per case, you know. Incidentally, you remember Mrs. Grimm, I'm sure. Or did you ever meet her?"

"I didn't."

"You know who she is, don't you? Well, meet her now. Mrs. Grimm, Sergeant Fuller."

Fuller nodded at Mrs. Grimm. Mrs. Grimm did not nod or speak. She did not move.

"Mrs. Grimm," said Marcus, "is the murderer of Mark Draper."

Fuller sucked in his breath, held it until his chest hurt, and then released it in a long sigh, barely audible. Taking a step forward, he leaned heavily against Marcus' desk. "Is that so?" he said.

"Unfortunately, it is. Isn't it, Mrs. Grimm?"

Mrs. Grimm didn't answer. She did not move.

"I would be interested in knowing," Fuller said slowly, "how you reached this conclusion."

"Oh, it was plain enough, Fuller, from the beginning. You were right, you know, when you said this case didn't sound so fancy. It wasn't. Mrs. Grimm had a passkey. Mr. Draper was sedated and presumably asleep. Mrs. Grimm simply admitted herself to the bedroom, stabbed Mr. Draper in the throat, and then, after a brief delay which permitted Mr. Draper to get good and dead, rushed out into the hall screaming

murder." He smiled benevolently.

Fuller looked with wonder at Mrs. Grimm. Mrs. Grimm did not move or speak.

"How," asked Fuller, "did you know?"

Marcus sighed and built a little tent of fingers on his stomach. "Mrs. Grimm came, presumably, to change the towels. But the towels had not been changed. Mrs. Grimm explained it by saying that she was naturally too distraught by what she found on the bed. Good enough. But what would most women do if, carrying an armload of towels, they came suddenly upon the body of a murdered man? I submit that they would throw the towels all over the place. Anyhow, as they screamed and ran, they would at least drop them. Did you see any towels on the floor, Fuller?"

"No," said Fuller, "I didn't."

"Let it go. That wasn't the big point, at any rate."

"What," asked Fuller, "was the big point?"

"You saw the room, Fuller. You saw how it was shaped. The bathroom is constructed in the corner, next to the outside hall, leaving between the bathroom and the opposite wall a short, narrow hallway. In the bedroom, the bed was placed against the interior wall of the bathroom. Around the corner,

that is, *Mrs. Grimm could not possibly have seen the body of Mark Draper unless she walked on into the bedroom.*"

"So," said Fuller, "she couldn't."

"And there was absolutely no reason why Mrs. Grimm should have done so. She was merely going to change the towels. She had been instructed, moreover, to slip in and out quietly so as not to disturb Draper. Instead, she went right on into the bedroom. Does that sound sensible to you, Fuller?"

"No," said Fuller, "it doesn't."

"Neither did it to me. I decided that Mrs. Grimm could bear investigation."

Again Fuller looked with wonder at Mrs. Grimm. Still Mrs. Grimm did not move or speak.

"Why?" said Fuller. "Why?"

"Why indeed? As usual, Fuller, you come directly to the heart of things. Unless Mrs. Grimm was a homicidal maniac, which she wasn't, there had to be some kind of reasonable motive. Had Draper fleeced her at one time or another? Had he, perchance, ruined her daughter or destroyed her husband? I was led, you see, to all sorts of melodramatic speculations. Anyhow, that's where I've been the last few days, Fuller. I've been on the backtrail of Mrs. Grimm, and I dug up, I must say, a couple of

rather, ah, enlightening episodes."

"What episodes?"

"Out on the west coast three years ago, Mrs. Grimm, then calling herself Mrs. Foster, worked as a maid in the private home of a well-to-do young couple. One afternoon, while the wife was away, the husband was shot and killed at close range with his own rifle. Mrs. Grimm, who was present, reported that he had been preparing to clean it and had shot himself accidentally. Circumstances aroused some suspicion, but the case, for lack of evidence to the contrary, was eventually closed as accidental death.

"But as you know, Fuller, I have a littered mind. There was one element in the case that reminded me vaguely of another case I'd read about, and after awhile I remembered just what it was. On the east coast some six years ago, a wealthy young husband was knifed to death in his home, presumably by a surprised prowler. The wife was spending the night with a friend, but the maid was in the house and testified to what had happened, prowler and all. Again suspicion was aroused, but the bulk of the evidence seemed to support the story. Case closed, and you are right as rain, Fuller. The maid, I discovered, although she called herself Mrs. Breen, and later called

herself Mrs. Foster, was no one but the woman who now calls herself Mrs. Grimm."

Whatever her name, she was made of stone. If she heard, she gave no sign. Whatever she felt, she felt in secret.

"And still," said Fuller, "I don't see why."

"Don't you, Fuller? Neither did anyone connected with those two cases. But I do. I see and I understand because all three cases, those and ours, have a common denominator. In each case, *the young wife was away and securely alibied.*"

Abruptly, almost angrily, as if he wanted suddenly to be done with the matter as quickly as possible, Marcus stood up and walked to the door that opened into the next office. He pushed the door open and stepped back. "Come in, Mrs. Draper," he said. "Your mother needs you."

"A mother and daughter team of professional murderers!" Fuller exclaimed.

"That's what they were. Daughter, damnably attractive, marries a reasonably rich man. Mother, in good time, is hired as a maid. Later, exit husband. Still later, much money inherited, including insurance. Later still, reunion of mother and daughter in another place far removed. Plush living, bright prospects of many husbands

to come, routine repeated. In our case, there was a slight complication. Draper insisted on living in a hôtel, so Mother had to get a job on the staff and work herself onto the right floor. She managed. Mother was clever."

"They were making a career of it!"

"Well, don't let it shake you too much, Fuller. It's been done before by others. Most of them have been poisoners. One of them, you may recall, was a chronic husband who kept drowning his wives in bathtubs. This time, at least, we had some refreshing variations."

Fuller looked at Marcus with surprising, if somewhat grudging, respect. You must, he conceded, give the devil his due.

"Tell me something," Fuller said. "The simple truth?"

"Nothing else. It is my code."
"You suspected Mrs. Grimm from the beginning. That's clear. Did you also suspect Dolly Draper?"

"I did."

"Why?"

"Because she's evil."

"Oh, come off. How could you possibly have known that?"

"I knew because a woman named Lucretia Bridges told me so. To everyone else she was poor little thing, sweet little thing, dear little Dolly. Not to Mrs. Bridges. You know why? Because like reacts to like, and one dog always smells another."

"If you want to know what I think, I think that's crazy."

"Nevertheless," Marcus said, "I'd give a pretty penny to know what was in old Winston's soup."

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